University of Stavanger

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN LIBERIA

How do international humanitarian organizations involve and promote local capacities in Disaster Risk Reduction in Liberia; and what is the local women's role?

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Teea Emilia Holmgren and Anne Katrine Moe

Summary

United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) has created a concept for reducing disaster risks, strengthening capacities of vulnerable societies and bringing those into a transformation of sustainable development. The purpose of this thesis has been to take a closer look at this concept, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and how it is implemented and practiced in humanitarian operations in Liberia. The research will show if, and how, local capacities and especially women are involved and promoted in the organizations' projects and activities. The majority of the empirical data is collected through fieldwork in Liberia in April 2012.

The theoretical foundation for this thesis describes the normative way of how humanitarian organizations should support local capacities in their disaster risk reduction programs. Furthermore, this thesis presents theoretical approaches about how organizational characteristics can contribute to a failure to achieve the program objectives, and several factors hampering the optimal way of supporting capacities.

One of the main findings in this study is that the understanding of Disaster Risk Reduction is very varied, as is the organization's perception about how their activities are reducing risks. These organizations need to seek one unified understanding to do as much good as possible in a cohesive manner. Another finding is that the organizations mostly focus on the local communities' vulnerabilities, and fail to recognize the capacities and existing structures. Women's involvement is limited to being beneficiaries, and they are rarely taking part in decision making in the organizations' projects. This study points at several challenges regarding disaster risk reduction activities and the involving and promoting of the local capacities, especially the women.

List of Abbreviations

DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
HDI	Human Development Index
HFA	Hyogo Framework for Action
GHA	Global Humanitarian Assistance
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
INPFL	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
LNRCS	Liberian National Red Cross Society
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
NDMC	National Disaster Management Commission
NDRC	National Disaster Relief Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PAR	Pressure and Release
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Risk Reduction
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
VCA	Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis/Assessment
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

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1. Introduction

Disasters are a complex mix of natural hazards and human action, and are globally increasing in numbers. A disaster's severity depends on the consequences and impact it has on society and the environment. Typically, the poorer the country, the more devastation and damage disasters can cause. Disasters are obstacles to the economic and human development at the household level when livestock, crops, homes, and tools are repeatedly destroyed. The effect of disasters is similar at the societal level when roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, and other infrastructure are damaged. Disasters happen because man can't control the nature. What man can do is to implement measures to reduce or cope with the potential negative consequences. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) has created a concept for reducing disaster risks, strengthening capacities of vulnerable societies and bringing those into a transformation of sustainable development. The concept is called Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) (UNISDR, 2004).

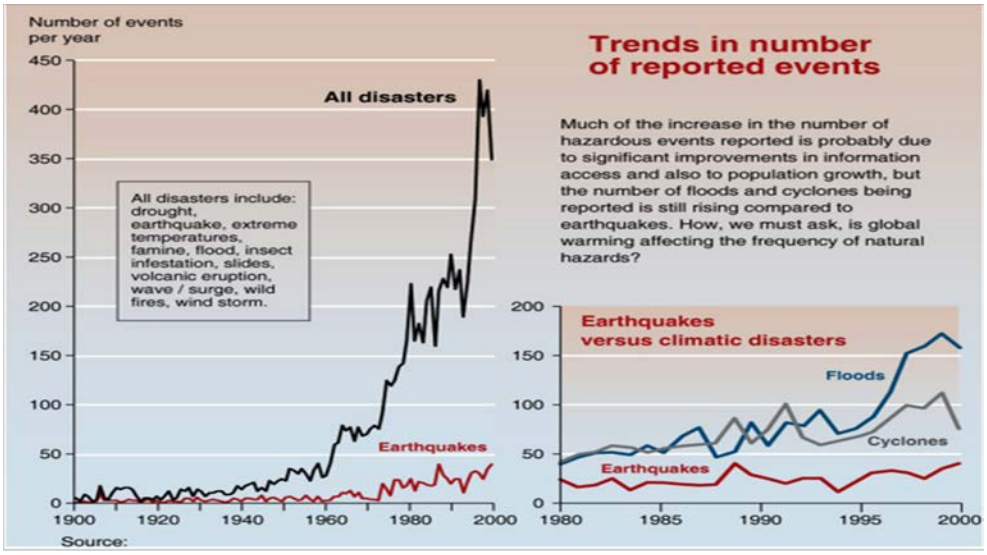

Figure 1: Trends in natural disasters
Source: Emmanuelle Bournay UNEP/GRID-Arendal

Figure 1 shows a significant increase in disasters. Access to information and better reporting systems might to a certain extent explain the increase; but changes in disaster risk are also driven by other underlying processes such as climate change, urbanization, economic

globalization, and poverty. With growing population and infrastructures, the world's exposure to natural disasters is inevitably increasing (Bournay, 2007).

It is known that poor countries are more exposed to the consequences of disasters because of inadequate infrastructure and poor living standards. On the Human Development Index[1] (HDI), Liberia, which is studied in this thesis, is ranked as number 182 out of 187. Figure 2 shows the relationship between the level of human development, deaths per disaster, and economic loss. It shows that disasters in the low developed countries claim more lives, while the economic losses are lower. This is not necessarily because damages are less, but because the value of the infrastructure is lower compared to the same in high developed countries. In addition, inadequate reporting of damages may have an impact on the statistics.

	Deaths per disaster	Loss per disaster ($ millions)
Low HDI	1052	79
Medium HDI	145	209
High HDI	23	636

Figure 2 : Level of human development and disaster impacts.
Source: Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon & Davies (2004).

Disasters occurring in fragile developing countries are often inadequately managed, and the state might not have control over the situation. Firstly, there could be lack of resources in the country, bad communication systems, and poor infrastructure. Secondly, even if the resources are there, poor governance may hamper the distribution. Poor governance may lead to new conflicts in countries recovering from years of war. In these countries the international humanitarian system is working hard to raise the countries up from years of devastation.

[1] The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite statistic used to rank countries by level of "human development" in terms of quality of life. The measures are including life expectancy, literacy, education, and standards of living for countries worldwide. It is used to distinguish whether the country is a developed, a developing or an under-developed country (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2011).

1.1 Background for choice of topic

"The more governments, UN agencies, organizations, businesses and civil society understand risk and vulnerability, the better equipped they will be to mitigate disasters when they strike and save more lives." Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General

The scale of the impact of a disaster depends on the choices we make for our lives and for our environment. These choices relate to how we grow our food, where and how we build our homes, what kind of government we have, how our financial system works, and even what we teach in schools. Each decision and action either makes us more vulnerable to disasters - or more resilient to them. This study aims to find out in which way the humanitarian organizations' projects and activities are reducing risks. DRR is about reducing the damage caused by natural hazards through focusing on prevention. Identifying, locating, measuring, and understanding risk is the first step towards design of policies, strategies, and actions for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR, 2004).

According to the World Bank (2012), Liberia was the third poorest[2] country in the world in 2011 and it is estimated that 64 percent of the population live below the poverty line. In poor countries, there are a lack of suitable resources that can hamper both the preparedness and recovery. Therefore, these disaster prone areas are often dependent on the international humanitarian organizations for assistance. When international humanitarian organizations intervene in a country or a specific area, they need to know the context they are working in (Anderson, 1999). People living in the area have first-hand information about the situation, and it is known that the local coping mechanisms and structures exist prior to arrival of international non-governmental organizations (INGO) (Dynes, 1993; Murshed, 2004; Quinn, 2002). Strengthening and developing these capacities is a key element in building resilience. Strengthening capacity should be central, so that local community better can work to reduce disaster risk or cope with disaster when it occurs. An important objective in this research is also to find out how the local capacities are involved in the risk reduction and prevention activities.

[2] According to Gross Domestic Product divided by midyear populations (The World Bank, 2012).

The local women are an important part of this research. According to UNISDR, disaster risk reduction projects, policies and programs will be meaningful and successful only if the interests of the whole community are taken into consideration. Without inputs from women, risk reduction strategies will not be designed for the entire community (UNISDR, 2008). The roles women play are essential to the survival and growth of families, communities, and societies; yet their roles are often underestimated (Scharffscher, 2010; Ariyabandu, 2009). Limited awareness of the gender dimensions in DRR causes an over-emphasis on vulnerability and the effects of disasters on women and girls (Enarson, 2009). Women's resilience and skills in coping with crisis make up a valuable resource that is underutilized by field agencies (Twigg, 2004). Enarson (2009) adds that, in order to build resilience to disasters, and hence reduce risk, a focus on women's knowledge, capabilities and experience is required.

1.2 Problem to be addressed

Disasters have become more frequent and people in developing countries are vulnerable. New strategies, concepts, and ideas are created to keep the humanitarian response as effective as possible, and to meet global needs. According to UNISDR, the focus for international humanitarian community should be on reducing disaster risk and building local capacities. This should be done in order to avoid dependencies and keep the societies on the track of sustainable development.

Pre-assumption in this research was that the concept of DRR is hampered by the complexity of humanitarian organizations and the situations they work in. The concept of DRR is relatively new, and limited research has been done. The focus in this thesis will be on describing how it is practiced and what the challenges are.

Based on this we have formulated our research problem as follows:

How do international humanitarian organizations involve and promote local capacities in Disaster Risk Reduction in Liberia; and what is the local women's role?

The concept of DRR includes a wide range of terms and activities. The description is normative, and shows how it should be done. It says less about how it is practiced. Therefore, the main purpose of this thesis is to study how Disaster Risk Reduction is practiced in "real life" in Liberia, and how local capacities are involved and promoted in this context. We have chosen a gender perspective and a particular emphasis is on the roles women have, as their capacities often seem to be overlooked.

The objective with this thesis is to generate knowledge about how DRR is carried out in a low developed country, and to describe the wide range of activities that falls within DRR. The aim is to identify how the humanitarian organizations promote and strengthen local capacities, particularly women. Theoretical perspectives have been applied to describe the ideal situation and to outline the potential limitations and factors that might hamper the effectiveness of the projects.

As the wording of the research problem indicates; some limitations are set. This study focuses on the international humanitarian organizations' work. These humanitarian organizations include INGOs and United Nations (UN) agencies. The study focuses on local capacities, which are the capacities that exist in the organizations' area of operation (in Liberia). In addition, this is an in-depth study of the women's role; hence there is no particularly focus on men and men's role in disaster risk reduction activities.

1.3 Relevant research

Systematic and extensive social science research on various aspects of disasters has been undertaken since the late 1950s (Dynes, 1993, p. 181). The subject of disaster risk reduction in the modern era draws its relevance largely from earlier contributions and previous practices in the field of disaster management (UNISDR, 2004).

UNISDR presented a global review of disaster reduction initiatives in 2004. One of the contributors of the book was Elaine Enarson. Enarson is together with Maureen Fordham and Kristin S. Scharffscher, important researchers in the field of women and disaster. Enarson was one of the editors in *Women, Gender and Disaster* (2009), a book that summarize global issues and initiatives. The book provides wide ranging perspectives on gender, women and

disaster risk reduction as well as several case studies on these issues. Both gender and disasters are widely studied; yet Disaster Risk Reduction leaves space for new generated knowledge.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis will first introduce some key terms and definitions, including what the Disaster Risk Reduction concept is about. Chapter three describes the context and the situation in Liberia and the areas were the field work was conducted. Following that is a presentation of the theoretical approach and then we will explain the rationale behind our methodological choices. Empirical data collected is presented in chapter six. A discussion based on the main findings is conducted in chapter seven. A conclusion, which gives the answer to the research problem, is presented in the last chapter.

2. Key terms and definitions

2.1 Risk, hazard and disaster

Risk, hazard, and disaster are words that have a multitude of meanings. The phrase "natural disaster" has caused confusion. Twigg (2004) claims that there is no such thing as a natural disasters; there are only natural hazards. The difference between a hazard and a disaster is an important one; a disaster takes place when a society or community is affected by a hazard. Hazards become disasters when lives and livelihoods are swept away, mainly as a result of human activities (UNISDR, 2004). A disaster is usually defined in the UNISDR terminology as;

> A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources (UNISDR, 2009).

The understanding of disasters as social rather than natural has been widely accepted, and the term of disasters as an "act of society" has replaced previously perceptions like "acts of God" and "acts of nature" (Dynes, 1993). Risk is the probability of something happening in the future which has, when talking about disasters, negative consequences (Twigg, 2004; UNISDR, 2009). Although disaster risk is sometimes taken as synonymous with hazard, it has an additional implication of likelihood of a particular hazard to occur and cause damage or loss to a vulnerable community or group. Hazard and vulnerability are mutually conditioning and neither can exist on its own (Cardona, 2004).

2.2 Vulnerability and resilience

Vulnerability and resilience says something about the way individuals and communities can cope in adverse circumstances. These are not exclusive concepts, not necessarily representing the opposite of each other, and nor do they represent each end on a scale (Manyena, 2006). The disaster is heavily influenced by the degree of the community's vulnerability to the hazard (Twigg, 2004). Vulnerability can be understood in several ways, but in this context it is referred to as "the characteristics and circumstances of a community, system or asset that

make it susceptible to the damaging effects of a hazard" (UNISDR, 2009). It is the human dimension of disasters, the result of the whole range of economic, social, cultural, institutional, political and even psychological factors that shape people's lives, and create the environment that they live in (UNISDR, 2009). Some groups are more prone to damage, suffering and loss in the context of differing hazards. Key variables explaining variations of impact include such factors as class, age, gender, ethnicity, and so on. The fact that we live in a certain area and have a certain status render us more exposed to harm (Wisner, 2004; Wisner et al., 2004). Understanding vulnerability requires more than understanding societies' past and present relations with regard to disasters. Vulnerability is also about people, their perceptions and knowledge (Bankoff & Hilhorst, 2004).

A focus on resilience means greater emphasis on what communities can do for themselves, and how to strengthen their capacities rather than concentrating on their vulnerability to disaster (Twigg, 2007). Faced with disasters followed by losses and suffering, people and communities seem to have physical and psychological assets that help them cope with the situation. UNISDR (2009) define resilience as "the capacity of a system, community or society exposed to hazards, to resist or to change in order that it may obtain an acceptable level in functioning and structure". Even if there are varied conceptualizations of resilience (Manyena, 2006), this is the approach in this context. Resilience is also to "build back better" not just "back to normal" (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998; Fordham, 2004). It is necessary to learn from past disasters for better future protection (UNISDR, 2009) to use the assets and capacities to "bounce back" (Wildavsky, 1988, p.77).

2.3 Capacity

Capacity is defined as "the combination of all the strengths, attributes and resources available within a community, society or organization that can be used to achieve agreed goals" (UNISDR, 2009). Capacity may include infrastructure and physical means, institutions, societal coping abilities, as well as human knowledge, skills and collective attributes such as social relationships, leadership and management. Capacity may also be described as capability or ability (Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative [CADRI], 2011). The aim with capacity building is to strengthen the ability of individuals, organizations, organizational units and/or systems to perform functions effectively and in a sustainable manner (ibid.). Local capacities

in this thesis are the capacities that exist in the community where the humanitarian organizations work.

2.4 Disaster Risk Reduction

Natural hazards can affect anyone and anywhere, but people are threatened by hazards because of their vulnerability (UNISDR, 2004). People have been dealing with disasters at all times, but the concept of Disaster Risk Reduction is relatively new in formal terms. It embraces earlier thinking and practice, and is communicated by UNISDR to international agencies, governments, and civil society organizations (UNISDR, 2004). DRR aims to systematically reduce the damage caused by disasters that often follow natural hazards. There are different definitions of the term in literature, but UNISDR (2009) defines DRR in the following way;

> The concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyse and manage the causal factors of disasters, including through reduced exposure to hazards, lessened vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improved preparedness for adverse events.

DRR includes disciplines like disaster management, disaster mitigation and disaster preparedness, but it is also part of sustainable development. To be sustainable development activities, they must also reduce disaster risk (UNISDR, 2004). The aim for UNISDR is to involve every part of society, governments, and the professional and private sector in Disaster Risk Reduction. There is potential for DRR initiatives in just about every sector of development and humanitarian work (Twigg, 2004): agriculture, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food aid and nutrition. DRR is a complex cross-cutting issue that requires an interdisciplinary and multi-level approach, bringing together knowledge, skills and resources of different stakeholders and in different sectors (UNDP, 2010).

There is still a limited investment in building resilience and DRR, despite rhetoric to the contrary (Cairns, 2012, p. 7). According to the latest Briefing Paper from Global Humanitarian Assistance (GHA) only one percent of all development aid is DRR (Kellet & Sparks, 2012). This means that one out of every 100 US dollar spent on aid is for reducing risks. In addition 75 percent of all DRR funding is directed to four recipient countries only.

3. Context

This chapter will present the context this study is conducted in. To begin with, an action plan adopted by several stakeholders to reduce disaster risk will be presented and DRRs relation to gender issues. Then, a brief introduction will be given about Liberia, its history, and the country's current situation.

3.1 The Hyogo Framework for Action

UNISDR is the secretariat of the Disaster Risk Reduction community. They also serve as the focal point for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) (Appendix 5). HFA is a ten year plan of action adopted in 2005 by 168 governments to protect lives and livelihoods against disasters. This is a key instrument and global blueprint for implementing Disaster Risk Reduction. Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters is HFA's overarching goal. This means reducing loss of lives and social, economic, and environmental assets when hazards strike (HFA, 2005).

The HFA is the first plan to explain and describe the work that is required from different sectors and actors to reduce disaster losses. It was developed and agreed on with governments, international agencies, disaster experts, and many others (HFA, 2005). The HFA outlines five priorities for action, and offers guiding principles and practical means for achieving disaster resilience. The priorities for action are following;

1. *Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.*
2. *Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.*
3. *Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.*
4. *Reduce the underlying risk factors.*
5. *Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.*

These five priorities for action capture the main areas of DRR intervention. There are key activities listed under every priority action to assist organization and other actors in their approach to DRR.

3.2 Gender approach

As previously mentioned there are various factors that affect people's vulnerability; their gender is one of them (Twigg, 2004; Wisner, 2004; Wisner et al., 2004). The word gender is often confused with women or sex, but sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women (World Health Organization [WHO], 2012). The definition of gender is according to UN Women (s.a.);

> Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys….These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a women or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities….

An approach, strategy, framework or program may be defined as gender-blind when the gender dimension is not considered although there is clear scope for such consideration. This is often as a result of lack of training in, knowledge of, and sensitization to gender issues, leading to an incomplete picture of the situation being addressed and, consequently, to failure (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2006). The Humanitarian Response Index reported in January 2012 that one of the most serious failings in humanitarian aid is the slow progress in assuring that gender is properly addressed (Cairns, 2012).

It is acknowledged that disasters and the project interventions have different impact on women and men. Cultural patterns that structure the lives of men and women must be understood. Differing needs, roles, and social power in different contexts need to be taken into account (Valdés, 2009). In general, disasters hit women harder (Ariyabandu, 2009; Fordham & Gupta, 2011; Twigg, 2004). Specifically engaging those groups most vulnerable to disasters is an essential part of building disaster-resilient communities. Capacities also differ between women and men, and it is important to acknowledge this (Anderson & Woodrow

1998; Metha, 2009; Twigg, 2004). Strategies that develop and strengthen women's capacities in disaster reduction acknowledge that they, along with men, are key actors in developing resilient communities (Metha, 2009).

3.3 Gender perspective on Disaster Risk Reduction

Gender relations are part of the social and cultural context that partly decides a community's ability to anticipate, prepare for, cope with and recover from disasters (Valdés, 2009). A gender approach in Disaster Risk Reduction is built on the understanding that both women and men are equal parts of the same society (ibid.). Without the input of both men and women, risk reduction strategies will not be designed for the entire community. Disaster risk reduction projects, policies, and programs will be meaningful and successful only if the interests of the whole community are taken into consideration (UNISDR, 2008).

All UN agencies have incorporated gender policies and strategies for mainstreaming gender[3] into their respective development and humanitarian mandates. Since DRR cuts across all mandated areas of UN agencies, from development to post-disaster relief and recovery, this has provided an enabling environment for gender mainstreaming in DRR (UNISDR, UNDP & International Union for Conservation of Nature [IUCN], 2009, p. 7). In addition, the UN has adopted the Eight Point Agenda[4] to focus specially on gender issues in disaster context (ibid., p. 8).

The Hyogo Framework for Action also states that a gender perspective should be integrated into all disaster risk reduction policies, plans, and decision-making processes, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management, and education and training (HFA, 2005). In 2006, governments recognized the neglect of women's needs, concerns and contributions to DRR at the 61st General Assembly and adopted a resolution

[3] Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels…. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (United Nations Economic and Social Council [ECOSOC], 1997/2).

[4] The Eight Point Agenda for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in Crisis Prevention and Recovery offers a comprehensive approach to address the needs of women and girls in crisis and gives them a voice in the recovery process (UNDP, 2008).

concerning the need to speed up the promotion of gender mainstreaming and women's participation in decision-making in DRR initiatives (UNISDR, UNDP & IUCN, 2009).

3.4 Liberia

Liberia is located in West Africa (Figure 3), bordering the Atlantic Ocean, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. Most of the country is a plateau covered by tropical forests. Covering an area of approximately 111.000 square kilometers, it has a tropical climate, with an average annual rainfall of 430 centimeters[5]. It is one of the wettest countries in the world, with a rainy season that runs from May to October (UN Liberia, 2012). Monrovia is Liberia's largest city and capital.

Of Liberia's population of 3.9 million, indigenous tribes account for over 90 percent of the population (CIA Factbook, 2012). Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions are the main religions in the country. Besides the official language English, approximately 20 ethnic dialects are used, although few are written. Life expectancy at birth is 57 years, and the adult literacy rate is 59 percent (ibid.).

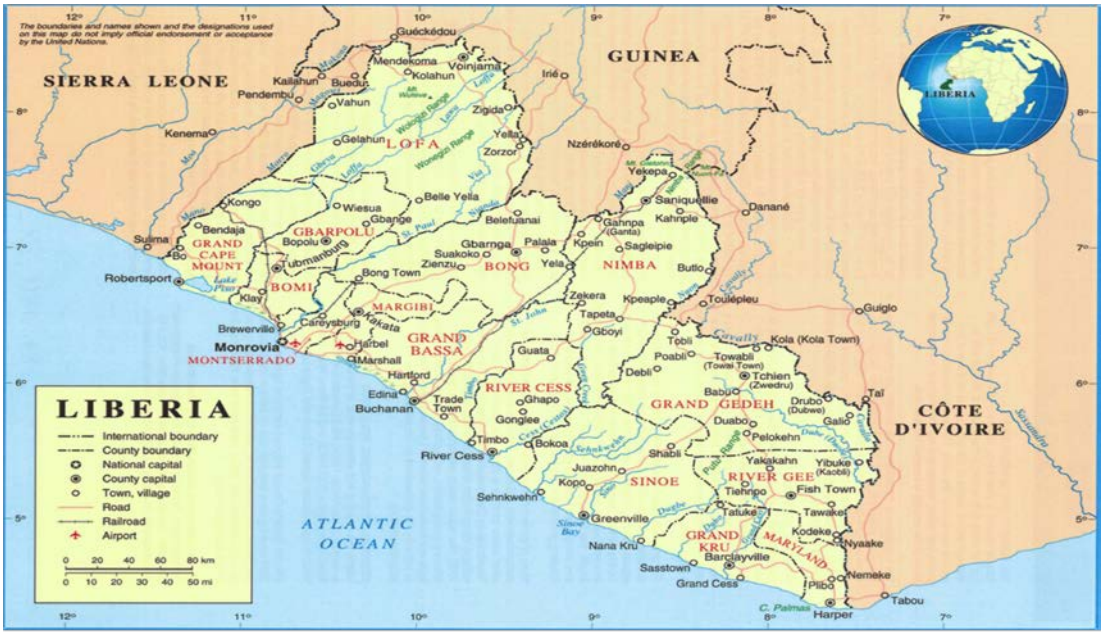

Figure 3: Map of Liberia.
Source: United Nations Children 's Fund [UNICEF], 2012.

[5] Average annual rainfall in Bergen, Norway, is 250 centimeters (Metlex.met.no).

3.4.1 Nimba County

Nimba (Appendix 1) is a county in the north-central part of Liberia, and this is where the data was collected at the field level. Saniquellie serves as the county capital, while Saclepea is where Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has their field office. The city has an estimated population of around 17.000. During Liberia's civil war, Saclepea was a primary recruiting and training area for child soldiers, many of whom still reside in the city. Now, Saclepea hosts one of Liberia's regional offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Bahn Refugee Camp, established in January 2011 for refugees from Côte d'Ivoire, is situated on the outskirts of the town. A vast area of bush had to be cut back to make way for the camp, which is 52 kilometers from Côte d'Ivoire. The UNHCR wanted to build the camp in order to ease the pressure on villages along the border, which were witnessing an influx of Ivorians fleeing post-election violence. The camp has capacity for about 6000 refugees. Repatriation of refugees is ongoing, but the camp still hosted approximate 3000 refugees in April 2012.

There are several INGOs working in the camp. Among them, Norwegian Refugee Council is responsible for camp management while Save the Children runs the schools and child protection activities. Norwegian Church Aid does WASH, and the International Rescue Committee has several programs with varied focus.

Many Ivorians have chosen to stay close to the border, and have been taken in by Liberians, making these communities "host communities". The host communities visited during the field work was Beadatuo and Beeplay. The first is a small village about five kilometers east of Bahn. There were approximately 5900 people living in the village, and amongst them about 80 were refugees. The second is located about three kilometers east of Beadatuo. There were about 6700 people living in Beeplay with about as many refugees as in Beadatuo. The refugee situation is making these villages more vulnerable to risks and conflicts.

3.4.2 History

Liberia, "land of the free," was founded by free African-Americans and freed slaves from the United States. The settlement in what is today's Liberia began in 1822 and by 1847 the Americo-Liberians were able to establish a republic. Liberia was Africa's first republic, and the country was never a colony of any European power (CIA Factbook, 2012).

William Tubman, president from 1944 to 1971, did much to promote foreign investment and to bridge the economic, social, and political gaps between the descendants of the original settlers and the inhabitants of the interior. In 1980, a military coup led by Samuel Doe ushered in a decade of authoritarian rule (CIA Factbook, 2012).

In December 1989, Charles Taylor launched a rebellion against Doe's regime that led to a prolonged civil war in which Doe later was killed. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervened in 1990 and succeeded in preventing Taylor from capturing Monrovia. Price Johnson, formerly a member of Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) formed the break-away Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). The full raging war between the respective armies of Doe, Prince Johnson and Taylor was a fact, and the Liberian people were caught in the middle. From 1989 to 1996 one of Africa's bloodiest civil wars took place, claiming lives of more than 200.000 Liberians and displacing a million others into refugee camps in neighboring countries (US Department of State, 2012).

A period with a transitional government and relative peace allowed for elections in 1997. The election brought Taylor to power, primarily because Liberians feared a return to war. For the next years Taylor's government did not improve the lives of Liberians. Unemployment and literacy stood high, and little investment was made in the country's infrastructure. Rather than focusing on improving the lives of Liberians, Taylor supported the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone (US Department of State, 2012).

Taylor's misrule led to the resumption of armed rebellion and major fighting resumed in 2000. By 2003, armed groups called Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) where challenging Taylor.

ECOWAS facilitated peace talks among the Government of Liberia, civil society and the LURD and MODEL rebel groups (US Department of State, 2012). At the same time Sierra Leone indicts Taylor for "bearing the greatest responsibility" for atrocities in Sierra Leone. All parties failed to respect the cease-fire signed in July 2003, but in August 2003 a peace agreement ended the war and former president Charles Taylor had to resign. Taylor faced war crimes charges in The Hague related to his involvement in Sierra Leone's civil war, and he was found guilty as charged for complicity in war crimes in April 2012. After two years of rule by a transitional government, democratic elections in late 2005 brought President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to power. She is the first elected female head of state in Africa, and she was also re-elected as president in 2011. The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) maintains a strong presence throughout the country, but the security situation is still fragile and the process of rebuilding the social and economic structure continues.

Besides killing and displacing people the war destroyed the country's infrastructure and economy. The civil conflict strongly disrupted the Liberian society; ruining families, social values, and trust between communities. Almost every Liberian family has been affected, suffering loss and psychological stress and trauma. Sexual violence conducted against women and girls was common during the civil war (Walch, 2010). Much progress has been made since the 2003 peace agreement, but enormous challenges remain (NRC, 2012).

3.4.3 Current situation

The post-election violence in Côte d'Ivoire reached its peak around February and March 2011. This resulted in over 180.000 Ivorians fleeing to Liberia and increased the strain on an already food insecure and fragile country. Serious humanitarian needs persist, both among the Liberians and the Ivorian refugees (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2012). The situation in Liberia is directly dependent on the situation in the neighboring countries. The political situation remains unsettled in many areas in the region.

The acute humanitarian emergency continues to stabilize, but significant humanitarian aid is still required to address the needs of the Ivorian refugees and their host communities in Liberia (OCHA, 2012). Failure to provide this assistance will harm the lives and livelihoods

of refugees and vulnerable host communities, and hinder recovery and community rehabilitation efforts in Liberia. Many refugees have returned home to Côte d'Ivoire, but there are still about 128.000 refugees in Liberia (UN Liberia, 2012). Due to cultural similarities and family ties, many of the Ivorians sought refugee with local Liberian communities. With the sudden and large increase in population, the meager resources and coping mechanisms in these rural communities were stretched to the bursting point. Food, shelter, basic social services, and livelihood options all became an issue of serious concern (OCHA, 2012).

Despite rich natural resources and potential for self-sufficiency in food production, Liberia's economy remains less competitive because of the high costs in the country (UNEP, 2004). High unemployment, poor health services, low literacy, corruption, and the absence of basic infrastructure slow down productive capacity and sustained economic growth. The expenses of rebuilding damaged infrastructure are enormous. The economy is heavily dependent on international donors, the presence of the UNMIL peacekeeping force, and INGOs. Foreign assistance still exceeds the national budget (US department of State, 2012). It was decided to adopt the Cluster Approach[6] in Liberia in November 2005 by the UN Country Team, in order to improve predictability, accountability, effectiveness of and partnerships of humanitarian action (Inter-Agency Standing Committee [IASC], 2006). The cluster approach was dissolved in 2008 and was replaced by sector working groups[7]. Not every organization working in Liberia reports to the Lead Agency, but as of November 2011, 73 organizations reported their activities to sectors.

3.4.4 Disasters and conflicts

According to The World Bank (2011), Liberia is considered to be one of the obvious "fragile states". This term is used for countries facing particularly severe development challenges; weak institutional capacity, poor governance, and political instability (The World Bank, 2011). Fourteen years of fighting and conflict destroyed much of Liberia's infrastructure,

[6] The Cluster Approach aims to strengthen overall response capacity as well as the effectiveness of the response in five key areas: sufficient global capacity, predictable leadership, concept of partnerships, accountability, and strategic field-level coordination and prioritization (One Response, 2011).

[7] Protection, Health and Nutrition, WASH, Food Security and Agriculture, Logistics, Education, and Shelter/Non food Items.

human resources and economy and made the country even more prone to disasters. Natural disasters have more impact on communities that already display many of the attributes typical of conflict-prone societies, namely high levels of income and asset inequality, lack of political robustness, and large youth bulges (Walch, 2010). Natural disasters in Liberia could potentially trigger violence; they represent challenges that require coping mechanisms and cooperation amongst the different levels of the society. Natural disasters are leading to increased tension, crime and violence, given that livelihoods break down and competition for resources increase (Institute for Security Studies, 2010).

Natural disasters could provide incentives and opportunities for violence as competition for limited resources heat up and the capacity of the state to control the situation decline. Natural disasters may affect the relations between the population and the government (Smith & Vivekananda, 2009). Lack of response to natural disasters may increase resentments toward the state. Basic infrastructure such as electricity and running water are missing in Liberia; only private generators (that only a minority can enjoy given their price) and wells provide electricity and water. According to Smith and Vivekananda (2009), failure by the state to provide basic water, food, and public health infrastructures influence the relationship between the state and its citizens. A declining capacity to meet such basic needs create a decrease of public confidence in state authorities, and increase the risk of instability and conflict escalation (ibid., p. 9).

3.4.5 Women's role in Liberia

Women have played a major role throughout the history of Liberia. They constitute 54 percent of the labor. In addition to running the households, women constitute the majority of smallholder producers in agriculture and carry out more than 80 percent of trading activities in the rural areas (UN Liberia, 2009). However, women remain among the most disadvantaged. They are disproportionately clustered in the least productive sectors, with 90 percent employed in the informal sector or agriculture (ibid.).

In 2001 the Ministry of Gender and Development was created in Liberia. In 2009 the Government, together with several UN Agencies, launched a Joint Programme on Gender

Equality and Women Empowerment. Women played a major role in the peace-building process. During the war, women's organizations worked to bring warring parties to the negotiating table (US Institute of Peace, 2007). The Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace campaign joined Christians and Muslims together to protest against the deteriorating security situation. Together with president Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee was rewarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011. They received the prize for their "non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work" (Nobel Prize, 2011).

3.4.6 Relevancy of the research site

This chapter has presented several factors which make Liberia vulnerable and less capable of managing the shocks from natural hazards. The country is characterized by low development, poverty, poor infrastructure, uncontrolled urbanization, and inadequate governance. In addition, the post-conflict situation in the country, and more recently the refugee influx, has led to a situation where several INGOs are operating in the country. These organizations are working with e.g. relief, reconstruction and development; in which UNISDR claims that DRR activities should be integrated. Therefore Liberia as a country makes a good starting point to collect the empirical data in order to answer the research problem in this study.

4. Theoretical approach

In today's world, the need for effectiveness in humanitarian actions is crucial due to the global trends. According to Cairns (2012, p. 4), these trends are "a rising number of people exposed to disasters; a rising number of weather-related disasters; and failure to move most conflicts and fragile states into sustainable peace and development". In order to meet these challenges the humanitarian system needs to increase the attention to the role of civil society with a focus on further building their capacities and building resilience in disaster risk reduction (ibid.). According to Quinn (2002), there will be increasingly stark gaps between these rising humanitarian needs and the response, unless greater capacity is found in the civil society of the affected areas.

The theoretical approach will be presented in two sections. Firstly, the optimal and normative way of how humanitarian organizations should support local capacities in their disaster risk reduction programs is presented. Secondly, the thesis presents theoretical approaches about how organizational characteristics can contribute to a failure to achieve the program objectives and hamper the optimal way of supporting capacities. The chapter ends with a summary of the theoretical approach and four research questions, which will be addressed throughout this thesis.

4.1 Building capacities

There must be a determination to build capacity with, rather than force it upon, local actors (Cairns, 2012). This implies that the organizations should work with the local communities, add value to their work, learn from their experiences, and help to develop locally-led disaster response. The process of capacity building should begin long before a disaster strikes. The long term support will enable local communities to respond more effectively from one disaster to the next (ibid.). The resilience of community leaders, activists, and women in particular is often revealed in self-help based on community solidarity, but few humanitarian interventions are designed on the basis of a clear understanding of how civil society works (Quinn, 2002). Quinn also argues that people and organizations affected are those best placed

to bring about its transformation. In times of disasters, local coping mechanisms exist prior to arrival of the INGOs (Dynes, 1993; Murshed, 2004; Quinn, 2002).

Disaster affected communities are often seen as victims in need of external assistance (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998). According to Helsloot and Ruitenberg (2004) it is a myth that people panic and become passive and paralyzed when facing disasters. It is rather the opposite; people behave rationally and organize themselves to help their families, neighbors, and community. People constituting these coping mechanisms in local communities want international actors to support local and community based organizations because they know the context and situation better (Brown, 2011).

Also Maynard (1999) acknowledges that there is significant knowledge and capacity in local organizations and populations, and this should be promoted. Scharffscher (2010) has been studying these capacities, and describes a gap between the resources that existed in the affected communities and what was acknowledged and utilized by humanitarian organizations. The process of utilizing and increasing the local population's ability to provide for itself, manage operations, make decisions, solve problems, and locate resources is, and should be used as, an invaluable tool by these organizations. Relying as an alternative, on regional specialists and supplies can decrease dependencies (Maynard, 1999, p. 165).

4.1.1 Women's capacities in disasters

Limited awareness of the gender dimensions in Disaster Risk Reduction causes an over-emphasis on vulnerability and the effects of disasters on women (Enarson, 2009). It is widely acknowledged that women in these disaster communities often represent key resources (Scharffscher, 2010; Fordham & Gupta, 2011; Enarson, 2009). According to Twigg (2004), women's resilience and skills in coping with disasters make a valuable resource that is underutilized by field agencies. Women are not only victims, but also agents of change and need to be further strengthened as such (Valdés, 2002; Valdés, 2009). Women often organize in some kind of networks or organizations at a community level. This kind of community organizing has proven essential in disaster preparedness and mitigation (Metha, 2009; Twigg, 2004). To map these organizations and networks, seek out credible women leaders in disaster-affected communities, and promoting their local connections and knowledge is a way

to include women and the gender perspective in Disaster Risk Reduction (Enarson, 2009). Women are often the first responders, or at the forefront in participating in disaster risk activities (Metha, 2009; Twigg, 2004; Yonder, 2005). Even if there are many examples of women's community involvement, women are still largely excluded from formal planning and decision-making and need to be empowered to do so effectively (Valdés, 2002). According to Scharffscher (2010), women remain excluded from humanitarian work, and gender issues get attention only from those with a special interest.

4.1.2 Understanding the context

One problem with aid is that it is often claimed to do harm, not only being good. Hence Anderson (1999, p.1) created a concept of "Do No Harm" based on the realization that "when international assistance is given in the context of a violent conflict, it becomes a part of that context and thus also of the conflict". This framework for analyzing aid's impact points out the importance of understanding the situation because each situation is unique; each society has its own history, culture, values, and tensions. Consequently, every project site is local and special (Anderson, 1999). The "Do No Harm" concept attempts to figure out how to do "good" without inadvertently undermining local strengths, promoting dependency, and allowing aid resources to be misused (ibid.). Also Maynard (1999) acknowledges the importance for international aid workers to constantly analyze their programs for their impact on long-term development, social relations, environment, regional issues, and political affairs. Equally important; outside assistance should build self-reliance into all activities. Therefore, programs should include training, local leadership, and participant responsibility.

Anderson (1999) describes conflict communities by connectors and dividers[8]. International humanitarian organizations tend to focus on the conflict, and undermine the existence of strengths, capacities, and connectors. As a result, aid is often provided in relation to the divisions in the society rather than in relation to support of the connectors (Anderson, 1999). History, culture, language, institutions and values, political and economic interdependence and habits of thinking and acting exist in all societies (ibid.).

[8] Conflict situations are characterized by inter-group tensions and divisions called dividers on one side, and local capacities for peace and connectors that interlink the people on the other side (Anderson, 1999).

4.1.3 Analyzing vulnerabilities and capacities

Anderson and Woodrow (1998) have created a framework for assessing vulnerabilities and capacities. Vulnerability and capacity analysis (VCA[9]) is one of the key activities and an important tool for disaster preparedness (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [IFRC], 2006), as well as an integrated part of relief operations (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998). Conducting assessments and analysis should be a starting point in acknowledging local expertise, experiences, and knowledge (ibid.). VCA provides a snapshot only at a given moment, as the situation sometimes can change rapidly (ibid.). The analysis is a helpful tool to organize and systematize knowledge and understanding of the situation (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998; IFRC, 2006). This knowledge and information is then used for designing and evaluating projects. By doing the analysis a humanitarian organization may highlight crucial factors and illustrate the relationship among factors that matter most to project effectiveness (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998).

According to Anderson and Woodrow (1998), the VCA should focus on community level. It is also suggested that the analysis should cover three different areas, namely the physical and material; the social and organizational; and the motivational and attitudinal (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998, p. 12; IFRC, 2006). The physical is about what productive resources, skills, and hazards that exist. The social covers relations and organizations among people, while the motivational is about how the community views its ability to change (ibid.). The information gathered for VCA should then be used to diagnose the key risks and existing capacities of the community. This should ultimately lead to activities aimed at reducing people's vulnerability to potential disasters and increasing their capacity to survive and resume their lives. Anderson and Woodrow (1998, p. 11) also argue that "to avoid increasing vulnerabilities, it is necessary to identify capacities in order to know what strengths exist in a society". It is important for the program designers to ask the question on each area on the analysis; "how will our intervention affect capacities and vulnerabilities?" (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998, p. 21).

Another tool for analyzes is the Pressure and Release (PAR) model (Appendix 2). The idea behind this model is that people's vulnerability is rooted in social processes and underlying

[9] VCA could also mean Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (e.g. IFRC, 2006).

causes which ultimately may be quite remote from the disaster event itself (Wisner et al., 2004, p. 50). The basic idea is that a disaster is located at the pressure point of two opposing forces; the process generating vulnerability on one side, and the natural hazard event on the other. The release idea describes the reduction of disaster - to ease the pressure; vulnerability has to be reduced (ibid.).

Root causes, dynamic pressures, and unsafe conditions are all subject to change. The uncertainties and gaps in knowledge concerning how vulnerability is linked to underlying causes or pressures might have quite serious implications (Wisner et al. 2004). According to Anderson and Woodrow (1998), focus should be on the capacities of the vulnerable. The PAR model does not provide information of the precise interactions of environment and society at the "pressure point"; the point where and when the disaster starts to unfold. Therefore Wisner et al. (2004) also describes an Access model (Appendix 2), which is required to understand the functions at the pressure point. This model has a function to explain different vulnerability to, and the impacts of, a disaster – why wealthier people often suffer less and why women and children may face different outcomes than men (Wisner et al. 2004). The Access model deals with the amount of "access" that people have to the capabilities, assets, and livelihood opportunities that will enable them (or not) to reduce their vulnerability and avoid disaster.

Conducting analyzes of vulnerabilities and capacities, as well as understanding the situation can help to prevent two pitfalls according to Anderson and Woodrow (1998). First, it calls into question any post-disaster attempts simply to "get things back to normal". Raising awareness of the factors that contributed to this disaster, shows that "normalcy" involved vulnerabilities that, if not changed, may lead to future disasters. Second, it makes humanitarian workers aware of the potential for unwittingly contributing to future vulnerabilities by their interventions (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998). Also Fordham (2004) acknowledges that to return a disaster-stuck area to the way, in which it was before, is to risk recreating vulnerable and disaster-prone communities in the future.

4.2 Complex organizations in complex environments

Looking back at the definition of disaster presented earlier, key words are that it is a disruption of the functionality of a society and it exceeds the affected society's ability to cope with its own resources (UNISDR, 2009). Communities and societies must be strengthened in order to cope with disaster. One way to do this is to increase the societal safety. Increased societal safety will make a community or society better equipped and prepared to face disasters.

The concept of societal safety was developed in Norway during the last decade in order to meet "new threats and changing risk" (Olsen, Kruke & Hovden, 2007). Societal safety is defined as "society's ability to maintain critical functions, to protect the life and health of the citizens and to meet the citizen's basic requirements in a variety of stress situations" (St. meld. nr. 17 (2001-2002), 2002; translated in Olsen et al., 2007). According to Olsen et al. (2007), the concept includes several safety-related areas; national security, sustainable development, human security, and incident management. Disaster Risk Reduction includes disciplines like disaster management, disaster mitigation and disaster preparedness, and sustainable development, according to UNISDR. Furthermore, Olsen et al. (2007) argues that these kinds of terms and concepts have the political power and that these "could be used to mobilize resources".

The concept of DRR could have similar implications in the humanitarian context as the concept societal safety has, according to Oliver-Smith (1998 in Olsen et al., 2007), "individually interpreted and defined by different interest groups in the light of their own specific agendas". The borderlines are overlapping with other concepts and phenomena, and the content is so unspecified that it can be applied to different political projects. "As a term, it therefore runs the risk of becoming void of any meaningful content", therefore these concepts might become inappropriate as an analytical tool (Olsen et al., 2007). They also argue that a concept as societal safety should be narrow enough to permit the systematic development of knowledge in the area, yet broad enough to impact a sense of familiarity of what it means. With concepts of this nature, a unifying norm for academic definitions is needed (Manyena, 2006).

4.2.1 Organizational challenges

Humanitarian organizations meet various challenges that might be difficult to overcome because of the nature of these organizations. Scharffscher and Olsen (2011) describe humanitarian organizations as highly complex operational systems that operate in a variety of countries with its headquarters, regional offices, field offices and posts. Additionally, the main characteristics of these agencies are that the various operational levels tend to be clearly distinct from each other in terms of operational focus and rationale. Headquarter staff normally work at the so-called blunt end of an emergency (Dekker & Supramaniam, 2005). This means that they operate in a relatively stable and predictable environment. Field staff, on the other hand, might face unexpected crises on a daily bases, where the individual practitioners' logistical skills, contextual awareness and creativity in finding solutions is important. According to Dekker and Supramaniam (2005), differences in perspective among staff working at the blunt end and the sharp end of an organization can be significant in terms of priorities and perceptions.

In order to implement decisions made at headquarters level, humanitarian managers rely on guiding documents, such as strategies, policies, guidelines, and agendas for action. These guiding documents do not always have the intended effect, or have a marginal effect on working practices at the field level according to Scharffscher and Olsen (2011). The outcomes and the effects of the policies and guidelines can be measured if impact assessments are conducted some time after the specific guiding document has been implemented. Such impact assessments are anyway few according to Beck (2006). The process of measuring implementation in outcomes is a challenging and costly affair (Kruke & Olsen, 2005).

Scharffscher and Olsen (2011) conducted a study focusing on intra-organizational mechanisms that may hamper implementation. The study shows reasons for virtual implementation[10] of guiding documents in humanitarian context. Firstly, focus might be on assessing the appropriateness of e.g. workshops, reporting routines, and the right combination of centralization and decentralization (Scharffscher & Olsen, 2011). This might lead to focus directed on governance of the implementing process, and not on the crisis-affected communities and the actual outcomes (ibid.) Secondly, a lack of communication between

[10] "The way in which managers at headquarters levels are left with a mistaken belief that their guidelines have made a humanitarian impact" (Scharffscher & Olsen, 2011).

different organizational levels might hamper implementation of the guiding documents. According to Scharffscher and Olsen (2011), the general rule appears to be that staff members at one organizational level normally have direct contact only with colleagues at the same level and the level immediately above. Therefore, the communication goes down through the organization via guiding documents and training, and back up via report-back. Maynard (1999) points to the lack of vertical as well as horizontal communication in humanitarian organizations. This often leads to a breakdown in information-sharing, both within and between organizations and interest groups. Field input into agency policy is rarely given the attention it deserves. As a result, programs and policies directed from the center may not be appropriate to existing conditions, or worse they may even prove harmful (Anderson, 1999; Maynard, 1999).

Top-down management approaches have been proved to be unsuccessful in addressing the needs of vulnerable communities (Fordham & Gupta, 2011; Yodmani, 2001). This approach is built on assumptions about social breakdown following disaster events which demand externally imposed methods of command and control. These frequently overlook or ignore pre-existing social networks and structures (Fordham & Gupta, 2011). The top-down planning and implementation is therefore claimed to be a poor substitute for community participation. A bottom-up approach to program design involves vulnerable people themselves in planning and implementation of mitigation measures. This approach has received wide acceptance because communities are considered the best judges of their own vulnerability and can make the best decisions regarding their own well-being (Yodmani, 2001). Local organizations can deliver more appropriate, locally-informed responses without disrupting community structures that have worked during pre-disaster periods. Though major disasters typically require external aid in order to cope, external aid should support—not replace—local practices (Fordham & Gupta, 2011).

4.2.2 Learning and sharing knowledge

People living in disaster-affected areas often have extensive knowledge about how nature behaves in their area and how extreme events will affect their communities. They have "adapted coping strategies based on previous experiences in dealing with disasters"; there

may be “a strong community organization”; and they often have resources in the shape of certain skills and attitudes (Murshed, 2004, p. 146). Such knowledge, however, often is referred to as “local knowledge”. According to Hilhorst (2004, p. 62), “it is rendered local because outsiders – in particular, intervening experts – label this knowledge as local, a status that, no matter how admiring, is ascribed to them by people from a superior position of universal knowledge”.

The learning and sharing of knowledge between organizations and local communities is often inadequate. In addition, lack of trust and poor communication might hamper the cooperation. Effective partnerships are based on mutual understanding, trust and respect, but partners may not know each other well enough, and may not spend time defining their relationships and partnerships. This could result in a lack of respect or trust, often evident to local communities (Brown, 2011). Locals could feel that their experiences and knowledge are not always sought, because the humanitarian organizations have predetermined the assistance they will provide and often just want to deliver the aid quickly. Sometimes, local organizations and communities feel “used” by international NGOs when they are included in project proposals just in order to comply with donor requirements that “local partners” must be involved (ibid.). Learning and sharing knowledge between organizations and local communities are sometimes considered time consuming. First-phase assessments are often done under time pressure and logistical and security constraints, but they are critical in determining initial target groups and locations (Zicherman, Khan, Street, Heyer & Chevreau, 2011, p. 3).

The complexity of the contexts in which disasters occur, and the speed with which organizations need to react, might leave little opportunity for the use of sophisticated analytical tools as presented earlier. Agencies often believe that emergencies require speedy response from outside, and they feel they have to rush to disaster scenes to be helpful (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998). Many international aid agencies may find it difficult to establish two-way relationships with local communities when they perceive that they are in a hurry (Brown, 2011). This often leads to a situation where local initiatives might be pushed away. However, most immediate needs of disaster victims are in most cases met by local people and organizations (Dynes, 1993; Helsloot & Ruitenberg, 2004; Quinn, 2002), and the “need for speed” is a myth according to Anderson and Woodrow (1998).

The danger of speed is that an agency in a rush will focus entirely on victims and their needs and suffering and fail to recognize their capacities. In the haste they often do not spend enough time identifying local partners and maintaining good and effective relationship with them (Brown, 2011). Capacity-building requires involvement and participation from the affected community. INGOs often assume all responsibilities for management and logistics and this sometimes override existing local capacities and structures. Much of the information that agencies need is either already available, or is easily obtained by making use of local people to gather it. The local people already know the situation when international humanitarian organizations arrive (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998, p. 45). Involving project participants in gathering and organizing data can empower local people and increase their ability to cope with their own situation (ibid.). According to Twigg (2004), using local capacities improves the likelihood of sustainability through ownership of projects; it strengthens community capacities, and empowers people by enabling them to tackle these and other challenges.

4.3 Risk perception

A key element in hazard and disaster management is awareness of how stakeholders perceive risk. Within social sciences, people's judgments about events, situations or activities that could lead to negative consequences are usually labeled as risk perception. It is important to know that human behavior is preliminary driven by perception and not by facts. These perceptions are believed to be formed by common-sense reasoning, personal experience, social communications and cultural traditions (Renn, 2008, p. 93). Risk perception is as important in determining responses and coping or adaptation strategies as an objective 'knowledge of risk'. Risk messages are constructed within, and as a result of social, economic and political contexts (UNISDR, 2004).

A part of understanding the context; the culture and traditions, is to also understand the common perception of risk. Risk perceptions can differ considerably among social and cultural groups. Communities' shared values and religious beliefs shape the attitude toward life, death, threats, and losses. The importance of risk perception in shaping people's behavior and disaster management planning is affirmed in several studies, and researchers have

emphasized the role of risk perception by demonstrating that the public relies on risk perception to evaluate hazard situation (Prabhakar, Srinivasan & Shaw, 2009, p. 17). It is important to consider the social contexts in which risks occur and that people therefore do not necessarily share the same perceptions of risk and their underlying causes (UNISDR, 2004).

The more constant and similar the losses from risk sources, the more likely the impact of average losses will be underestimated. These risks can be passively accepted (Renn, 2008, p. 95). The phenomena for underestimating risks are in some studies referred to as subjective immunity (Boyesen, 2003). There is a high probability for incident, yet the risk is underestimated when people think that they have control if something happens or they are living close to the risk. Perception can be viewed as a process of transforming inputs, like a flood warning, to output like public mitigation response. People who perceive that they are vulnerable are more likely to respond to warnings and undertake protective measures (Burn, 1999). Understanding how people will perceive the risks communicated to them will influence how effective a risk management measure will be. Traditional knowledge systems, as well as cultural aspects such as indigenous beliefs, traditions and ways of coping are important determinants in risk perception. In addition, deeply rooted beliefs, that are destiny-oriented or which pose a fatalistic vision of disasters, can reflect a religious or ideologically inherited sense of vulnerability. Such views may present a great challenge in moving towards the acceptance of a culture of prevention and protection (UNISDR, 2004).

4.3.1 Communicating risk

One important question is how to treat risk perceptions in a policy arena that includes responses of different actors and the general public (Renn, 2008, p. 93). Policy-making needs to organize systematic feedback from society and, include risk perceptions as an important input to decide whether something should be done about a certain risk and what the effort should be. Risk communication is bound to bring forward concerns. Risk managers are well advised to ensure that the best available knowledge is distributed to those who raise these concerns (ibid.). Levels of risk awareness depend largely on the quantity and quality of available information and on the difference in people's perceptions of risk. People are more vulnerable when they are not aware of the hazards that pose a threat to their lives and property. Risk awareness varies among individuals, communities and governments, according

to their particular perceptions as presented above. These can be influenced by the knowledge of hazards and vulnerabilities, as well as by the availability of accurate and timely information about them (UNISDR, 2004).

Risk communication is important at each stage of the disaster assessment process (UNISDR, 2004). Risk communication means the imparting and exchanging of information about aspects of the risk. Effective communication has to be at the core of any successful activity to assess and manage risk. If the expert assessments are communicated to the public in a sufficient way, the tension between public perceptions and expert judgments could be bridged (Renn, 2008, p. 201). Effective communication, or its non-existence, has a major bearing on how well people are prepared to face and cope with risk. Limited knowledge of an involvement in the risk management process can lead to inappropriate behavior in emergency or risk-bearing situations (ibid.). Risk communication has several functions; education, risk training, and create confidence in institutions responsible for risk management. Risk communication should be regarded as a mutual learning process between the public and the professionals. It is not the task of the communicators to decide what people need to know, but respond to the question of what people want to know (ibid., p. 204).

4.4 Theoretical summary and research questions

The theoretical part of this thesis has presented how humanitarian organizations can work in order to identify local capacities and further strengthen them. This is important as resilient societies and building local capacities are cornerstones of Disaster Risk Reduction. Women are important parts of these societies and their capacities needs to be recognized as well. However, humanitarian organizations are complex systems operating in complex environments; hence there are several factors that can affect their work. Based on the context and the theoretical approach four research questions have been developed. These have to be answered in order to address the *main research problem.*

- Which activities are reducing disaster risks?
- How are local capacities identified and involved in DRR activities?
- What are the main challenges with disaster risk reduction?
- What role do women have in disaster risk reduction activities?

5. Methodology

The rationale behind our methodological[11] choices and the following outcomes is presented this chapter. We explain how data collection was structured, as well as the process for analyzing the collected data. This chapter provides an overview of the different choices we made, with regard to both methodology and method, in order to explore the use of local capacities in disaster risk reduction activities. Above all we can state that this process has been a dynamic one, but according to Blaikie (2010) change is part of the research process. We will get deeper into reflecting the trustworthiness of our findings and discussing strengths and weaknesses of our research.

5.1 The research design

Different disaster risk reduction activities and disaster-affected women who are often excluded from humanitarian planning and decision-making, constitute the primary focus in this study. In addition, we have been particularly interested in local women's capacities and knowledge, and in what way humanitarian organizations have involved these in their risk reducing activities and programs in Liberia. The concept of Disaster Risk Reduction formed the basis of this study.

We have chosen a qualitative method in order to answer the research problem. Patton (2002) says that qualitative analysis is a reasonable beginning point for research in new fields of study where little work has been done, and little is known about the nature of the phenomenon. The concept of DRR is relatively new and so far limitedly studied in Liberia. Our goal with qualitative research was to develop understanding of phenomena related to people and situations in their social environment. Choosing a qualitative approach allowed us to collect the data in words instead of in numbers (Blaikie, 2010), as well as use the data collection methods that bring us deeper into the issue. In addition, qualitative method involves

[11] Blaikie (2010) holds that there is a difference between method and methodology. Method involves an introduction of the procedures and techniques the researcher used in order to gather and analyze the data, while methodology is a critical discussion regarding how the research was (or could have been) done.

a researcher “in one or more periods of sustained immersion in the life of the people being studied” (Blaikie, 2010, p. 206). This is often referred to as field research, which in this study consists of a four week period in Liberia. During that period data was gathered using several qualitative data collection methods. These were several types of interviews, discussions and observations which will be presented later in this chapter.

This research is of an exploratory character, and thus it is important to come close to the representatives of the INGOs and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) to get a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. With this explorative approach, our aim was to create new knowledge based on the empirical findings. The new knowledge must be produced by interacting with the field that is being studied and let the phenomena being studied be the generator of new knowledge (Patton, 2002).

Based on the theoretical chapter and document studies, we had some pre-assumptions before field study in Liberia. According to our understanding, the disaster risk reduction projects were not promoting the local women’s capacities as well as they could, should, or as well as they state they do. Much is written about gender, women and their special needs. Not much is written about their capacities and knowledge and how this could be promoted and strengthened by INGOs.

Time	Activity	Purpose	Outcome
December 2011	• Reach out to humanitarian organizations	• To get access to the field and scout possibilities for partners	• No answer
January 2012	• Topic and problem to be addressed • Contacting more humanitarian organizations	• To start studying relevant documents • Present research objectives to a possible partner	• A research proposal • Access to Liberia
February – March 2012	• Document studies and literature review • Interview-guide • Study the research site • Contacting organizations in Liberia	• Fieldwork preparations	• A theoretical perspective • Interview guide • Knowledge about the region • Appointments for interviews
April 2012	• Field Study in Liberia • Data collection through interviews, discussions and observations	• Produce findings	• 14 semi-structured interviews at country office level • 6 interviews at field level • Observations and discussions in refugee camp and host communities
May – June 2012	• Analyzing and systemizing the data	• Reduce the data being analyzed • To answer the research questions	• Produce answer to the research problem stated

Figure 4: The research process

5.2 Background research and preparations

From the beginning of this process both of us agreed that conducting a field study would add great value to our research; a real life experience would increase our understanding of the topic. We started reaching out to humanitarian organizations in December 2011, when the research question and location was still not decided.

In order to identify a research problem we conducted a literature review. During the search for published papers and existing theories, we used concepts of women, gender, Disaster Risk Reduction and local capacity. By conducting literature review we gained knowledge and created a better understanding of the research topic. The literature review gave an overview of

the key authors that will be used in this research, as well as it helped us to formulate the research problem.

In the beginning of February 2012 we got confirmation from the Norwegian Refugee Council that they would facilitate our field study in Liberia. Then, a period with targeted preparations started.

5.2.1 Document studies

The aim of the document studies was to obtain an overview of the work that the international community had done in relation to the topic. The document analyzes provided a good basis to meet the field, and the phenomenon that was studied. We also conducted a document study where Liberia was the main focus. The purpose was to get as much knowledge as possible in advance about the culture, traditions, and history etc.

In the document study we searched for information regarding Liberia specific disasters and vulnerabilities. The first part of the empirical data is primarily based on two documents; the Capacity Needs Assessment in Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDP, National Disaster Management Commission [NDMC] & Ministry of Internal Affairs [MIA], 2009) and the Desk Study on the Environment in Liberia (UNEP, 2004). In these documents we looked for characteristics of the environment and disaster risks in Liberia and for efforts that has been done previously in order to reduce the risks. We needed to conduct these document studies, since we had limited knowledge of Liberia prior to this research.

5.2.2 Interviews

The second part of the data gathering was conducted in Liberia, where the primary data was collected by using different types of interviews; semi-structured, in-depth, and focus group. These interviews were our main source of empirical data. The qualitative interview, particularly the in-depth variety, can get close to the social actors' meanings and interpretations (Blaikie, 2010, p. 207), which was what we were hoping to achieve. Our purpose with the interviews was to gain an overview of how the organizations conduct their

daily work regarding DRR and women. We wanted to investigate what elements in the organizations' activities the informants considered as risk reducing and how the local women were involved in their projects. In order to determine this, we needed the informants' own perceptions about what they do to reduce risk, how local communities are participating, and especially what they considered as the local women's role.

In the refugee camp and host communities we used focus group interviews. The purpose was to get an enhanced insight and to investigate the issues from different perspectives. These interviews helped us to figure out opinions that the informants had. In addition to the formal data gathering we were observing during the field trip. The observations and the discussions with local people that we got to know have also, to some extent, contributed to the results. It might not have directly impact on the result, but it had indirectly impact on our understanding of the context and the topic studied.

5.2.3 Design of the interview guide

Semi-structured interview guides (Appendix 3) were designed prior to the field study. These were based on the theoretical approach, document studies, as well as the research questions. The aim was to cover the main thematic areas of the thesis and to get an answer to the stated research problem. The semi-structured version of interviews gave us more flexibility and the guide functioned as a useful tool in the interview situations to be sure that we covered all the thematic areas.

Different interview guides were designed because we aimed to interview different groups of informants. We made four interview guides focused on the information we wanted to get from the INGOs at the country and field office level, from governmental offices, and from NGOs. The topics were equivalent in all the guides, but the focus was slightly different. The focus group interviews with the beneficiaries were conducted without an interview guide. The informants' expressions guided the discussion.

5.3 Field studies and data collection

The data collection was conducted during the field work in April 2012 in Liberia. We requested several interviews at the country office level in Monrovia prior to the field study. The remaining data was gathered at the field office level, and by discussing with the beneficiaries.

5.3.1 Selection of informants

A qualitative study has a strategic selection of informants to ensure qualitative information and the goal is to cover the relevant social roles and perspectives. In this research the selection of the informants has been based on several criteria.

The aim was to gather information from the UN organizations, INGOs, and NGOs. We used a contact list from Humanitarian Coordinator's Support Office (a UNMIL section), to select these organizations. We wanted to choose different organizations in terms of size, focus group of beneficiaries, place of origin, and nature of the organization itself. The aim was to get a representative sample. We contacted 20 different organizations from the list, presented the research and requested interviews. 14 of these organizations (Appendix 4) gave us a positive answer, and therefore the informants have also been selected on the basis of their availability. We had interviews with 14 humanitarian organizations in Monrovia in addition to the National Disaster Relief Commission (NDRC). The latter was the starting point to get a better overview of the state's capacity in terms of disaster management.

The goal was to also conduct interviews at the field level in order to find out whether the understanding of the topic varied between the different organizational levels. The informants in Nimba County were chosen more randomly since we only had a couple of days notice before we went there. Furthermore, the snowball-method was used; the people we interviewed recommended us to talk with others. This was an appropriate way to proceed since we didn't contact the organizations in advance. In addition to interviewing INGOs at field level, we interviewed refugees in the refugee camp, and representatives in two host communities.

5.3.2 Conducting the interviews

We realized after the first interviews that there were some weaknesses in our interview guide. Not only in terms of the guide itself, but also the awareness and knowledge that our informants had about the concepts which the interview focused on. We needed to make minor changes in the interview guide, so that the background information had a larger focus in the interview. At the same time it had an effect on how deep into the information we were able to get. Some interviews at the field level, in the camp, and at the host communities, were conducted as focus group discussions. These interviews were influenced by a random group composition. We hadn't arranged the meeting in advance, hence it was the people who were available that attended. People were curious and "came and went" during the discussions in the camp and in the host communities.

If the informants gave us permission, we used recorder during the interviews and we also took notes. When transcribing the interviews, we used the notes as a supplement because sometimes there were disturbing sounds on the recorder, such as telephones ringing, people talking etc. The interviews were all conducted in the interviewees' environment such as offices, meeting rooms or public spaces in the camp or villages.

5.3.3 Number of informants

We arranged 14 interviews prior to arrival in Monrovia, and our plan was to contact more organizations if necessary while we were there. A specific plan for the number of interviews was not predetermined, but we planned to conduct as many in-depth interviews as needed. The aim was to go on until we believed that there was limited new information to be collected in order to answer the research problem. The satisfactory level was reached, and we ended up with a total of 14 interviews in Monrovia, while having 19 informants. The informants' positions are ranging from country directors, head of delegation, secretary general, and quality manager to disaster risk reduction manager. We also had two interviews at the governmental level, the NDRC and the Nimba County inspector, a total of three informants. In addition, we had nine interviews at the field level including the refugee camp and communities. There the total of informants was 28.

5.4 Systemizing and analyzing the data

The last part of the research process was conducted after returning home from the field study. During this period the transcribed empirical data was reduced, systemized and analyzed. The systemized data constitute the basis for further discussion of the research problem.

After the field work we had collected a lot of data. We transcribed interviews as soon as possible after the interview took place. We also noted down ideas and observations along the way. After returning back home the process of data reduction begun. We systemized it in accordance with the research questions presented in chapter 4.4. One challenge when organizing the data was that the data collected during the field study varied widely. It was challenging to see the patterns, and we needed to work thoroughly with the empirical data. The patterns and the main findings from the empirical data are further discussed on the basis of the theoretical approach. The aim was to constitute the understanding of the empirical data and the concepts, by using the theoretical approach.

5.5 Research quality

We should be able to remain critical to the quality of the data collected during the research. Two important issues are whether or not the research investigates what we wanted it to investigate, and whether or not we can rely on the data we have collected. These issues are often referred to as reliability and validity, and will be discussed in this section.

5.5.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to how the study was conducted, and if the data material can be perceived as reliable. “Because human behavior is never static, no study can be replicated exactly, regardless of the methods and design employed” (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). In this methodological chapter we have tried to explicitly describe the reasoning behind the methods we have chosen, and what we consider are weaknesses and strength with this study to enhance

the reliability. We have described how the data was produced, collected, and processed in the previous chapters.

The procedures implemented in order to conduct data collection are connected to whether or not we can rely on the data gathered. When conducting fieldwork, both the context and human behavior are changing and dynamic. A challenge connected to this kind of qualitative research is that it is difficult to repeat or reconstruct the study precisely, due to changing conditions (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Even though we were taking roles as objective researchers, we might have influenced the informant's ideas and expressions with our presence. It has been an advantage, that we were two researchers.

5.5.2 Internal validity

Combining interviews, observations, and document studies contributes to a stronger validity of the research. Through the use of several different sources of information; namely UN, NGOs, INGOs, governmental bodies, and the beneficiaries, we were able to obtain several perspectives on the same phenomenon. The ability to ask the right questions is also essential for receiving the right answers. We assumed that our informants had more knowledge about the DRR concept than was the reality. For this reason we needed to edit our interview guide and strategy. Both, the wide range of different informants as sources of information and our flexibility in data gathering, increased the internal validity of this research.

The internal validity is the degree to which the findings of the study make sense to the informants and to others, and the degree to which they are credible. The entire research project has been cooperation between two different personalities, views, and ideas. In an interview situation both were asking questions, as well as following up if something was unclear. In addition to recording the interviews, we took notes and wrote summaries about the interview situations. This way we were able to go back to our notes and bring to mind the atmosphere and possible disturbances in each of the interviews. The whole project has been characterized by discussions, reflections, and questioning the observations. In addition, we asked each of our informants to summarize their main issues in the end of the interview. The purpose was to list the most important message that had been discussed during the interview,

and this way we could get the vital information repeated and what the informant regarded as most important.

5.5.3 External validity

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), external validity concerns whether the conclusions of a study are transferable to other contexts, or whether the findings can be generalized to other fields. They also claim that in qualitative research: “The only generalization is; there is no generalization” (ibid., p. 110). Generalization based on findings from a qualitative study is not possible beyond the context and time where the study was conducted; instead we talk about whether the results from a study in one context can be transferred to similar phenomena in a different one.

Kruke (2010) distinguishes between the “outer” and “inner” contexts. The “outer” context in this study might be seen as post-conflict Liberia where the organizations are engaged in DRR activities. The “inner” context may be understood as the organizational structures, guidelines, standards, statuses, and responsibilities among the humanitarian organizations, which are engaged with disaster risk reduction activities (Kruke, 2010 p. 5).

In the “inner” context of this study a potential transferability may be seen. Organizations with the same structures, guidelines, and responsibilities are often found in other areas similar to Liberia. This study has been exploring how the UN concept, Disaster Risk Reduction, is implemented and practiced by several humanitarian organizations in Liberia. In addition, their knowledge and perception of this concept has been important for the study. The humanitarian organizations in Liberia can be compared to other organizations working in other complex and unsecure environments. In the case of disasters risks; insecurity always exists, because hazards are often unpredictable and in some extent unmanageable events. Therefore, we can claim that the findings from this study can be transferable to other contexts where they are working with disaster risk reduction.

An important finding has been that there is limited knowledge of the concept. Any concept of the scope and nature such as DRR may have the same complications. Findings in this research

may have an importance in the design and implementation of new concepts, in order to understand the pitfalls this might have. The concept is defined differently by those who use it, and the local women's capacities are not promoted despite rhetoric to the contrary. This is a gap that might exist in other humanitarian emergencies as well. To identify and understand these gaps is a good way to improve the humanitarian aid and its effectiveness and accountability.

5.5.4 Strengths and weaknesses

We were given the opportunity to travel and research a context that is exiting and interesting; this made both of us very eager to learn and gain new knowledge. We were able to collect primary data and experience the "real life" context we previously only had read about. We also consider it as a strength that we had a great variation amongst the informants according to the organizational level, location etc. This also includes the informal discussion with local people that gave us better understanding of how the reality is like.

An open and flexible approach to the research problem was an explicit decision, and made it possible for us to make changes during the project. This flexibility was also required during the trip to Nimba County. The trip was facilitated by and depending on NRC, and we had to adapt to and adjust our interviews to changing situations in a very short notice.

It is evident that, when a researcher enters a research site, the pre-assumption might cause some biases. For instance Blaikie (2010) claims that it is impossible to produce any data without researchers influence on it. We had created an idea about the context before we arrived to Liberia. In some extent, this was based on the document studies and literature review, and partly reflecting the ideology of the Social Science department at our University in Stavanger. We were aware of these issues, and have tried to be conscious in order not to have a biased effect on the data collected and conclusions made.

We consider that we had enough time for data gathering, though it was quite late, and later than planned, in the research process. We had many interviews during the first week in Liberia because we were afraid that we did not have enough time. This led to a very hectic

first week, but an advantage was that we had time to transcribe and discuss the outcome while we were still in the field. A key advantage is that we have been two researchers working together; this has given us the opportunity to discuss and reflect continuously during the process.

6. Empirical data

This chapter presents the empirical findings. These findings are based on document studies, and on interviews in Monrovia at the country office level. The information gathered at the field level in Nimba County, the refugee camp, and the villages are used to deepen the empirical data.

In order to describe which activities the organizations regard as reducing risk; it is necessary to identify the risks that are typical, and how disaster management is organized in Liberia. This is described in the first three subchapters. In the fourth subchapter the empirical data regarding risk reduction activities is presented. Subchapter 6.5 presents the data concerning local participation, and the next describe challenges with DRR activities. The last subchapter introduces data concerning women involvement.

6.1 Disaster profile

Liberia is highly vulnerable to environmental instability due to extreme poverty (UNEP, 2004). For their livelihoods; including food, fuel, shelter, water and medicines, the rural poor in Liberia are depending on land and other natural resources, which make them vulnerable to climatic changes (ibid.). National documents argue that the average temperature in Liberia has been increasing and will continue to do so (National Adaption Program of Action [NAPA], 2008). This threatens agriculture by disrupting rainfall, both variability and intensity, and by increasing the occurrence of disasters, such as flood, storms, heat-waves and pest (ibid.).

The most common hazards causing disasters, according to UNDP, NDMC and MIA (2009), are floods, windstorms, fire, and sea erosion. Incidents of drought have also been reported. Climate related hazards are expected to worsen with climate change. Disposal of toxic waste in rivers leading to water pollution has been of some concern, and land disputes have potentials for conflict. Epidemics and invasion by animals from game parks are serious threats to some communities. Environmental degradation result largely from human activities, and include practices such as illegal mining of sand, sea erosion, soil erosion, and deforestation (UNDP, NDMC & MIA, 2009).

The risk of flood is increased when several factors are present, such as deforestation, poor drainage system, poor water management, poor waste management, and urbanization obstructing water ways (Walch, 2010). Floods trigger population displacement, destroy crops and food supplies, as well as infrastructure. Moreover, the poorest people in Monrovia live in swamp areas extremely vulnerable to floods and waterborne diseases (UNDP, NDMC & MIA, 2009). Windstorms are destructive in terms of infrastructure and livelihood assets. Storms blow away roofs of houses and warehouses which can damage crops or other products intended to be sold, or stocks that have been saved in case of food shortage. It is argued that rainfall changes and heat-waves also have resulted in more frequent occurrence of pest (Walch, 2010).

6.2 Disaster management in Liberia

The main governmental body for disaster management in Liberia is the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the National Disaster Relief Commission which works under MIA. In 2007 and 2009 the Government of Liberia, together with the UNDP, conducted a National Disaster Risk Reduction Capacity Needs Assessments. The assessments were a part of the Government of Liberia National Process on Strengthening National Capacities in Disaster Risk Reduction. The first assessment focused at central and national level structures. Building on the 2007 assessment, the 2009 Capacity Needs Assessment targeted the counties, districts and communities. The purpose was to assess capacities and gaps in disaster risk management at sub-national levels of government (UNDP, NDMC & MIA, 2009). The Capacity Need Assessment concluded that there is need for a better DRR framework. Regarding the financing of DRR, the NDRC has an annual budget of 34.000 US dollars, but there are no designated funds and resources for DRR in local government systems (UNDP, NDMC & MIA, 2009).

The process of creating better functioning disaster management structures in the country includes the development of documents such as emergency preparedness guidelines and contingency plans. One of the most important ongoing processes is to get a draft policy about DRR to become a legislative law. This implies the establishment of a separate disaster risk reduction unit. With such a unit, the issues of disaster management would get more focus and

allocated resources. According to several informants, this policy has been a draft in process for a very long time. Many of the informants are looking forward to the establishment of the risk reduction commission.

"Practically all of Liberia's governance institutions have collapsed as a result of the civil war and armed conflict" (UNEP, 2004, p. 68). At the moment the government is responding to disasters when they occur, and many agree that there is a lack of early warning systems, preparedness and prevention activities. One informant said that "the state is not prepared for yearly disasters; and then they cry for disaster assistance". The main activities at county level are limited to assessments of disaster events and reporting to the central government. Nimba County is the only one, out of fifteen, that has developed a contingency plan (UNDP, NDMC & MIA, 2009). The communication systems in disaster management are almost non-existent and the poor infrastructure makes the government's response very challenging (ibid.). The main challenges for disaster issues at the government level are communication, logistical problems, and movement in the country due to damaged roads and lack of resources. According to Capacity Needs Assessment (2009), "no visible concrete risk reduction programmes are in place".

The Liberian National Red Cross Society (LNRCS) is working in line with the government, and assisting in relief. The LNRCS have recently adopted a policy on disaster management. The new LNRCS strategy works towards community resilience and disaster management. Risk reduction is an objective in the strategy. In addition, they are working with developing county structures. The INGOs have risk management as an integrated part or a cross cutting issue in programs, but DRR lacks allocated funding and resources. There are very few who say that they focus on disaster risk reduction. Some of the organizations do not see how the programs reduce risks in any way.

6.3 Hazards and risk mapping

The most evident finding according to the empirical data is that the risk, hazards, and disasters are understood very differently. This understanding varies from disasters being non-existent to a wide range of disasters caused by natural hazards, other risks and undesirable events. The risk for conflicts threatening the peace in the country, and health related issues were also

mentioned during the interviews. The following is a presentation of the informants' perception of the major and important risks.

6.3.1 Natural hazards and risks

The most frequent mentioned disasters are floods, sea erosion and wind storms according to informants and UNDP, NDMC and MIA (2009). Flooding is the main problem in the lowland areas of the country. In these areas, rivers are threatening the dwellings and livelihood of the population during the rainy season. Sea erosion by the coastline is a risk and it also destroys houses and buildings. Both floods and sea erosion, are causing periodical displacement of people in the disaster prone areas, and the consequences are often worse than it should be due to the fragility of infrastructure. A major problem in Monrovia is overpopulation; the city was build for 500.000 inhabitants, but now hosts more than twice as many. The overpopulation makes the city very vulnerable; people are building houses and settle down in areas vulnerable to floods. There are also several who mentioned that wind storms are causing problems. The trees are natural wind breakers protecting the villages, but due to deforestation in highland areas this protection is gone. According to one informant, "the poverty is the worst enemy of environment". When people are poor it is more likely that they will overexploit the natural resources. Also according to UNEP (2004), the long conflict "destroyed both natural resources and manmade infrastructure in Liberia".

6.3.2 Conflict based risks

Conflict based risks that the informants mentioned are land disputes, spillover effect from conflicts in the region, as well as conflicts between clans and ethnic conflicts by the borders. Land disputes are quite common, and are caused by the years of war. Prior to the war people owned land, but due to insufficient documentation there is no evidence of the owners. The conflicts arise between the returnees and those that have settled down on their previous land. Different groups of people e.g. youth can start rioting or cause other types of security issues. Refugee influx might be causing an emergency conflict because people run out of food much earlier than planned and start fighting over scarce resources. Other mentioned risks that could

cause conflicts are bad function political system, poor practice of democracy and the rule of law, as well as low employment and lack of education. According to UNEP Desk Study (2004, p. 8), "direct linkages are apparent between environment and security, as well as between environment and development".

6.3.3 Other risks

House fires are widespread adverse events for Liberians. Due to lack of electricity people use fire for cooking and light up with candles. Unsafe management of these might cause fire incidents. Regarding agriculture, a few mentioned army worms and insect infestations that destroys crops. This can lead to food insecurity. One contributing factor affecting food insecurity in the long run is the traditional slash and burn[12] farming (or shifting cultivation) method. This method has an effect on the composition of the soil and creates further erosion. There are several factors contributing to food insecurity in the country, such as low level of production; most of the food consumed in Liberia is imported. In addition to these, some mentioned risks due to the INGO driven economy as well as some health related issues e.g. cholera outbreaks and malaria.

6.4 Risk reduction activities

The following is an example from one informant;

> The first thing in DRR is the early warning signs. There will always be signs, but what happens is that people don't care or don't know it. So people need to become aware. Second is to be prepared, either to deal with it or leave before the disaster occurs. Third is to recover. Sometimes they identify the risks, but they don't have means to handle it. The resources are not there. There is no capacity to give all resources; and still organizations wonder why they are not moving to a safer place. It is difficult to act on just a threat. We have to change the mindset from response to preparedness.

It is not just a great variation of the perception of risks, hazards and disasters, but also which activities the organizations consider risk reducing. Some of the organizations do not see that their activities and projects are reducing risk at all. Several organizations indicated that DRR

[12] Slash and burn is an agricultural technique which involves cutting and burning of forest to make fields.

activities are an integrated part of the programs, but they are not named disaster risk reduction. One interviewee said: “We don’t do project in DRR, but it is integrated in all our activities”. Three organizations noted that they have allocated resources for disaster risk reduction in the form of emergency fund or an employee focusing on DRR. One organization indicated that;

> We have been able to mainstream climate change and coastal erosion issues to the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), even though it is very difficult when people are coming from the war and priorities are different. They are not looking at DRR, but health and education. Talking about DRR is difficult.

The informants consider their risk reducing activities in various ways. Also the following answers were given: “That - I have not been thinking about, how we do reduce risks...” or “Disaster management is not any way a priority here.” But some answered: “There is always risk involved. Addressing the primary causes or root causes of the risk helps us to avoid future reoccurrence.”

6.4.1 Awareness

The most evident pattern in risk reduction activities is awareness raising, which is done in several ways and by using many kinds of methods. Awareness and knowledge creation is also considered as one of the main activities in order to build people’s resilience and to reduce vulnerabilities. According to the data gathered, awareness raising activities can be divided into targeting two different focus groups. Firstly, some organizations work at the governmental level in form of advocacy and policy making. Secondly, other organizations focus on the community or beneficiaries that receive assistance. Some organizations are focusing on the governmental level only, others the community level, whereas most of the organizations do both.

Awareness raising is done in many different ways, including talk shows, radio programs, training sessions, workshops, meetings, and putting up signs and posters. Enhancing people’s awareness and educating them on the risks and dangers is in many cases done by creating community structures and educating trough those structures. Knowledge is widely held as essential in changing people’s perceptions and attitude, as well as building their resilience.

One informant said that: “We are creating awareness and educating about the dangers…. And we have community structures, and we train these structures.”

The first step when approaching a future beneficiary community seems to be the creation of a group that cooperates with the INGO. These groups or “structures” are called community change agents, community leader groups, committees etc. The aim is that these groups should continue to mobilize and sensitize the entire community after the INGO has finished their project. This way the community will become more self-sustainable and the program will have a long term effect.

There are varied ways of educating the people, and the INGOs’ view on their own role is also differing. One informant said that: “We do not just talk to them, we also listen to them, not everything what we do is good. We can have an idea that might work, but you don’t want to introduce a whole new ideology, but to strengthen the existent one”. Another said that: “Disasters have happened before, but we tell them why it happened”, while some said: “We teach them the risk”. But one said instead: “We take components of disaster risk reduction and integrate it in the training”.

6.4.2 Providing resources and skills

Some of the INGOs reported that they are reducing risk by providing resources. Anyhow, most of them did not regard risk reduction as a main purpose, but rather as a by-product. As an example, one INGO tried to identify issues related to difficulties with farming, and then they tried to improve that. Through improved farming and production, the food security is strengthened and risk of malnutrition is reduced. But there were also examples of providing building materials, water pumps, seeds, and hygiene items to the communities.

Several organizations were doing skills training. One organization explained that skills training programs can increase young people’s possibilities of engaging in livelihood activities and increase their possibilities for employment.

6.4.3 Building capacities and strengthening resilience

Several organizations were giving support to communities and individuals to build capacities and to mitigate hazards. "The aim is to bring people to a higher level of resilience by providing more assistance and for a longer period of time." Awareness raising, competence building, providing resources, and all the activities mentioned above are expected to lead to strengthened community capacity. One informant claimed that;

> This strengthens community resilience because when people are prepared, the risk is minimized. But if they are not prepared, whenever it happens, the risk is very high and so will be the cost and number of victims. We want to prepare communities that whenever there is warning signs they can take action.

Only one organization embraces HFA and has a DRR manager. From their point of view the training provided is making communities able to respond to a disaster prior to arrival of external assistance. According to this organization, they want to improve the people's lives and way of living where they are, instead of moving them to a safer place. In addition, they were aware of that their activities were strengthening resilience of the communities. They said, "that is what we are trying to do - to reduce risk".

6.5 Local involvement

It is regarded as the organizations' responsibility to get the communities involved. Many informants expressed that the local communities are participating in the planning and implementation of the programs. According to six of them, the most common way is that organizations facilitate an election of a community committee. Thus, it is the community residents themselves who choose its members. There might be requirements from the INGOs about gender distribution, or that some of the members have to be from certain age groups or other groups. Once the committees are established, all communication and cooperation goes through them.

6.5.1 Communication

Most of the organizations encourage mass participation when arranging meetings with the communities. They expressed that local authorities, men, women, youth, and elders should all be included. Sometimes they gather focus groups if they want to target a specific group of people, e.g. youth. One informant said that: “We encourage mass-participation; women groups represented, youth and elderly represented, the political elite in the community as well as government representative.”

In the meetings, the focus seems to be on a two-way communication with the participants. These dialogues are also used to manage the expectation and divisions of roles and responsibilities. Meetings with the communities can be done in one day or last up to about two weeks according to the informants. Through two-way communication the INGOs learn the local community’s limits, constraints and what they are capable to do. Many of the organizations mentioned that the communities should come up with their priorities and what they need assistance on.

6.5.2 Needs assessment

Each organization does some kind of assessments before implementing a new project or program. The way they do it, who is involved, and what is included in the process seems to vary to a certain extent. Risk is neither a specific, nor a separately defined part of the assessment for any of the organizations. In an emergency situation most organizations do a “rapid need assessment”. In the initial phase they do not necessarily have participatory assessments, as it requires more time and resources, “...but once it is in a development phase, we go into the communities and do a lot of assessments”.

Basically, the organizations choose the areas where they work based on either the communities’ needs or the resources or a specific knowledge the organization has to offer. “We have an office in all the counties we work, part of their work is to visit new communities and assess their conditions”. According to one informant, they should choose the poorest communities, but they admit that it is not always possible. When they work with the

government on e.g. building health clinics, the locations are defined by the government. It can also sometimes be defined by donors, if they have specific requirements on which areas the donor wants to direct the funding. The most common way to choose where to work is the needs assessment; this kind of assessment is mentioned by several organizations at country office level as a pre-condition for intervention.

6.5.3 Participatory assessment

The importance of participatory assessments is recognized by the informants. "Local communities are the beneficiaries, so they have to be included" and "most important are the beneficiaries themselves" are statements emphasizing this. "It is the people living in the community and living with the risk who are the ones who can give you information about what the problem is and also possible solutions. In this way they are also a part of the decision making process." A participatory assessment can be done through focus group discussions and/or meetings with the community. In the meetings they are discussing what the community's needs are, and what the community considers as the best solutions for them. "We do not just do the assessment and think our way is the best way", as one informant stated.

"There is history of disasters in every community, and we work with the communities to understand the hazards and building their resilience". When gathering information about the community, the information contains details about hazards and risks, and what the community needs to address this. Only three organizations said that they collect data about the community's capacities like e.g. their traditional coping mechanisms. Despite the evident pattern showing that the participatory assessment is more embraced, all organizations did not have the same standard. One interviewee said: "…we actually teach them the risk", while another said: "The community is informed about the program, and we ask the community if they want to join and then we tell them what to do".

Secondary resources are also sometimes used as an input in the assessments i.e. data gathered by other institutions and organizations. If there are other NGOs working in the same area with the same kind of interventions, the organizations get in contact with each other and discuss

where to intervene. The same discussions could also be held with other stakeholders, like governmental institutions, government civil servants or members from the county teams working with specific sectors (e.g. health, agricultural).

6.5.4 Implementing partners

Many of the organizations are working through implementing partners. In these cases it is the partners who are implementing and running the projects. These partners are local NGOs or what one organization called “cooperatives”. The international NGOs plan the strategy with the implementing partner and the partner is responsible for the actual implementation and the practical work.

Before engaging in partnership with a local NGO, one of the informants said that they did partnership assessments. The local NGOs gave them their concept paper, and if they were selected as partners they received training in program planning, managing, budgeting, and working methods. When they train people, they also teach them how they could train others. The advantage of working with partners is the capacity building and the sustainability element. The partners and local NGOs get the necessary capacity to continue the work on their own. It can be time consuming to work through the partners and sometimes it takes time before results can be seen, but “it has a wider effect and a positive long term effect”. Even if it is time consuming it is cost effective, “we can use less money and do much more”.

6.6 Challenges with Disaster Risk Reduction

6.6.1 Risk perception

There are very varied thoughts about the people’s awareness of the risk they are living with. Of the informants, it was the same number who said that people do not know that they are living with the risk, as it was those who said that they do know the risks. Mostly, the informants agreed that people don’t have means to do anything about the risk. An interesting factor might also be that the risk they are facing now is perceived as insignificant in

comparison to the war and the risk this led to. Three of the informants expressed this directly. One said the following: “People don’t know that they live with risk. When the war was over maybe people felt that the risk was insignificant, and they felt untouchable.” There were just a few informants who were aware of that people needed assistance to be able to do something about the risk. They need resources and tools to become more resilient. According to some informants, the poor do not often have a choice, for example they build in exposed places due to lower price. “Enough awareness has been done…”, but “…the people do not take the risk seriously”.

6.6.2 Evaluation

Most of the organizations are embracing a sustainable development objective in their programs. The aim for them is to support the communities to become self-sustained and continue the same activities and way of doing things as the INGO has taught them to do. Several informants were hoping that the communities would use the resources provided after the programs are terminated.

Each one of the organizations evaluate their projects or programs, but this mainly focuses on whether they have achieved the program objectives or not. Evaluation of the impact on risk and risk reducing factors is seldom a deliberate part of it. One of the informants mentioned the ”Do No Harm” principle; their idea was that when they are working in a community, they are avoiding adding anything to the tensions. In this way they regarded risk for conflict and land disputes to be reduced. Most of the interviewees confirmed that risk was not a part of the evaluation.

Nine of the organizations mentioned that they are conducting mid-term and final evaluations. In the mid-term evaluation, organizations review whether the objectives, so far, are achieved or not. Mid-term evaluation might result in changes of program design. A common practice is also that evaluations are an on-going, continuous process done by the fieldworkers. Several organizations conduct periodic evaluations, while the time intervals vary. The evaluation is done in cooperation with the partners, the beneficiaries and sometimes the government if they are a stakeholder. In some organizations the program managers are responsible for evaluation,

while some use activity reports from the community committees, and one also said that the donors evaluate the projects. Consultants from outside the organizations are also used, because it is "good to have a reality check" as one of the informants expressed it. External consultants are used for the reason that "you should not evaluate yourself".

6.6.3 Following up the projects

Very few of the organizations follow up the projects in the communities they work in after the project is terminated. This is also considered a weakness by many of them. It is widely indicated to be a lack of funding that makes it impossible to do follow-up or impact evaluations. "The challenging part is to measure outcomes a year or two after the project is finished. No donors will pay for that". If the INGO is staying in the same area after a project has been terminated, some might go back to check upon the committees and how they are coping on their own. Though, this is done very randomly by the organizations. "I think this is a flaw of many development programs…. What happens after five or six years, this is not monitored". Similarly to other evaluation activities, follow-up that measures the risk and its reduction is carried out only if it is a specific part of the program design. None of the organizations had DRR programs at the moment.

The organizations sometimes follow up their own major programs, but not the ones run by partners. "I can't remember the last time we went back to see what happened in these areas", one said about a project implemented by partners. "We have discovered that we are weak in that area", another informant said. Development projects and projects with a long-term aim are supposed to be sustained in the communities and are more often monitored than other minor projects. According to an informant, "sustaining the programs is important…it is very important to go back and follow up; it gives the community some insurance. Like you really wanted to give them the knowledge and show the community that they can make a difference". Some claimed that they do not "just want to leave an area and never come back, but we feel like we have no choice". The problem that arises in cases like this is that they have resources to build e.g. wells, but not to maintain or repair them.

The larger part of the organizations uses an exit-plan or strategy. "We do not start something unless we have an exit-plan". It is most common to have an overall exit-strategy for the

organization in Liberia, but also specific exit-plans for every project or program. The aim with this is to have a systematic way to finish up and withdraw the staff from a specific area. The exit strategy deals with how the organization can hand over the work to the local partners, and that the project continues in a self-sustainable way. “We work for that, - that they will manage themselves when we leave”. Sometimes the project could also be endorsed to the local government units, the aim is that “the local government should be able to continue and support the project”.

6.7 Women’s involvement

Every organization has gender on the agenda. Of the organizations, all except one had a gender policy and the last organization explained that they embraced the government’s gender policy. The way the policies are implemented in the daily work varies to some extent. Common to all is that gender is mainly about women: “We do gender focused programs, automatically we think of women when we do our programs”, “…we say gender to be women”. Gender is described to be a cross-cutting issue, meaning that it should be integrated in all the programs and activities.

6.7.1 Threats against women

Women in Liberia live with several threats that are specific for them. Some of the informants mentioned that women are more vulnerable to disasters than men. The largest risk for women in Liberia is related to security and access to health facilities. Cases of domestic violence, sexual violence, and rapes are still high in number. The post-war setting and the cultural context are factors affecting this matter. Women seem to be marginalized by men. In addition, it is a highly patriarch system operating in Liberia; systems and structures are designed and operated by men. Women do not get recognized and have limited power. Women are lacking education even more than men, and therefore they have fewer possibilities for employment and to be financially independent. Traditionally, women have no part in decision making, and were not allowed to speak up when men were present. In most communities, women neither have access to heritage nor land rights, even if the law is there and on their side. The

organizations said they see improvement in this area through their work, but ”it is still a long way to go. It takes time to change the mindset, of both men and women”.

The lack of health facilities put many women in danger, especially when they are pregnant and when giving birth. Treatment for diseases are not available, and “women die for nothing”. Women are generally those who take care of children and households, and are responsible for getting water and food. These tasks are more difficult during disasters like flood, storms and drought. Women have an important role in agriculture as they often run the farms. This is one of the reasons why women often are targeted in the agricultural projects.

Women’s participation is described in two different levels; firstly about having female employees, and secondly considering female beneficiaries or project participants.

6.7.2 Female employees

An obvious challenge, according to the organizations, is to employ educated and qualified female staff. Some organizations describe themselves as equal opportunity employers, and most of them strive for a gender balance in their own staff. Several of the organizations would like to have more female employees, but “the supply is not there”. Three informants said they would choose a woman over a man if they had the same qualifications. “If a woman meets the minimum requirements, she will be chosen over a man with the same or better qualifications”. According to one of the informants, “women do rarely apply for jobs because they do not feel good enough”. Few women have a university degree, and those who have, do not want to work in rural areas where the organizations are working.

None of the interviewees pointed out any negative sides of working with women, except for the limitations in education and availability as mentioned. The positive aspects and strengths are dominating. Women are described to be more committed, determined, and patient when working with other people. It is necessary to have a staff composed of both men and women, but also different age groups. They need to have different people to connect with and talk to different groups in the community: “It is not all kind of information a man can get from a women, a young can get from the elder and vice versa”.

6.7.3 Female beneficiaries

The requirement for a certain amount of female beneficiaries can be internal in the organization or an external requirement from donors or the government. When it comes to gender balance amongst the beneficiaries, most of the organizations aim for 50 percent women in the programs. In some cases they over-do it "because we can", as an informant expressed it. The organizations encourage female participation in the meetings and committees and they often have requirements on how many women that should be present. They try to gather men and women, "…so they can listen to and discuss with each other". Where there are cultural restrictions, some organizations talk with women separately to ensure that everyone's opinion is taken into consideration. One of the challenges is that women say they don't have time to attend or participate, so the organization tried to facilitate meetings on places and at times suitable for them (e.g. Sunday after church). One of the other challenges mentioned is that even when the women are in the meetings, they are physically present but "…they don't speak up". Sometimes they are present in the meetings, but their function might be to make and serve tea or coffee. "Therefore we work with children" one of the informants expressed; "…the hope is when we focus on the children -that over time, when these children grow up to be adults these traditions will not be practiced anymore."

Working with women benefits the whole community because they have a lot of impact on household level, and they take care of children and other relatives. Women are also considered to be able to share their knowledge, "…it is not just about learning the skill; you have to be able to transfer it to others. Women are good at this." According to one informant, "the programs with best results are the ones with focus on women". Women are more involving and take ownership: "If you want to initiate a project on an idea and you want local ownership and sustainability, the best way is to start with women". When asked why they choose to work with women, most informants emphasized the good qualities, such as commitment and patience. But some also focused on the vulnerabilities, and that women had many disadvantages: "Mostly our beneficiaries are women, because we want to pick the most vulnerable people".

The informants gave several examples on how they worked with women. In one case the organization trained 250 women in disaster risk reduction. They were trained to identify

hazards, do community mapping and plan mitigation strategies. Women are more interested in these kind of activities because it "…benefit's them directly". Training in agricultural and business activities can make the women financially independent, and this can give them a confident-boost. Typically, the health projects focus on mother and child, and there are special work done to ensure girls' education.

7. Discussion

The main finding based on the empirical data is that the concept of DRR is understood very differently among the informants. Each organization talks about the same approaches or concepts, but defines and understands it differently. This chapter contains a discussion about what the informants see as their risk reducing activities, and which limitations and opportunities that follows this. Further, there will be a discussion about local participation and women, and which challenges and implications that may affect the humanitarian organizations' work in these areas.

7.1 Disaster Risk Reduction in Liberia

Priority Action 1 in Hyogo Framework for Action states that one has to ensure that DRR is a national and local priority (HFA, 2005). As previously mentioned, the humanitarian organizations work with both government structures and local communities. UNISDR claims that DRR can be implemented in all the sectors in the humanitarian environment. Disaster risk reduction activities can be, and are, to some extent implemented in the agricultural sector, as well as in food aid and nutrition. The provision of safe water and sanitation solutions and especially hygiene promotion are vital to reduce the spread of epidemic diseases. Disaster risk reduction in the WASH-sector can prevent outbreaks of waterborne diseases, caused by malfunctioning water supply, pollution of water resources, and lack of sanitation facilities. When it comes to immediate response, provision of sufficient quantities of safe water, arrangement of basic sanitation, and promotion of good hygiene behavior are on the top of the list.

It is important to make an effort in areas like early warning and preparedness. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risk, and enhance early warning is one of HFA's Priority Actions (HFA, 2005). This can be communicated through e.g. educational activities. According to UNISDR (2009), education is an interactive process of mutual learning between people and institutions. Reducing risk and vulnerability to disasters requires people understanding how they can best protect themselves, their property and their livelihoods; this is knowledge that can be

generated through education. Awareness and learning about risks and dangers needs to start in early education, continuing through generations (UNISDR, 2009).

The empirical data indicates that there were various understanding about risks and various understanding about how the informants believe local people perceive risk. In addition, there are different approaches and methods to reduce risks, and different understanding about the factors that reduces the risks. According to data gathered, it is very difficult to find any specific pattern of the understanding. It was, however, obvious that the UN agencies and those having children as a target group had a better understanding of the concept. Furthermore, it is important to specify that the organizations were either reducing risks deliberately, unintentionally, or have not been thinking that their intervention reduces risks in any way, and some did not regard risk reduction as something that their activities did in any extent.

7.1.1 Awareness and changing mindsets

Previously in the empirical findings, it is indicated that the most common method for risk reduction amongst the informants is awareness raising and knowledge creation. This is also important according to HFA. Priority Action 2 states that: "The starting point for reducing disaster risk and for promoting a culture of disaster resilience lies in the knowledge of the hazards … and the vulnerabilities to disasters that most societies face" (HFA, 2005). The aim with these activities is to make people aware of the risk and give them knowledge to maybe do something about it, which in the long run may strengthen their resilience. These activities intend to change the way people think and lead to behavior change after a period of time. Even though not all of the informants see the connection with awareness-raising and risk reduction, there is a potential in this. In this thesis it is demonstrated that people's vulnerability is not natural, but a result of economic, social, cultural, institutional, political, and psychological factors. Awareness with the initial impact on mindset has potential to shape people's lives within these areas, and to re-create the environment that they live in by strengthening their resilience.

The main challenge is that changing behavior and people's perception is a time consuming task since these are old habits and traditions. In addition, this thesis indicates, based on the

theories presented, that humanitarian organizations need to be very aware of the impact of their activities. They need to be aware of the possibilities and challenges their activities have, in order to get the best outcome and impact, and to avoid the negative impact (ref. “Do No Harm”). The message from the informants was that the impact evaluation is problematic; although it is possible to measure how many people attending training sessions, the outcome and impact after a longer period is difficult to measure in terms of numbers.

7.1.2 Disaster Risk Reduction and sustainable development

Disasters in Liberia like floods, windstorms, fires, and insect infestations impact development in several ways. Disasters damage the already poor infrastructure and livelihoods, and cause human, environmental, and financial losses. Recovery requires funding, often money originally planned for development. This way, disasters can delay development and so; Disaster Risk Reduction is important for sustainable development. In order for development activities to be sustainable they must also reduce disaster risk. On the other hand, “unsound development policies will increase disaster risk - and disaster losses” (UNISDR, 2009).

It is stated in Priority Action 4 (HFA, 2005) that disaster risk also should be addressed in development planning. Most of the organizations are emphasizing the sustainable development objective in their programs. Their long term aim is self-sustained communities that are able to uphold the activities and methods even after the INGOs leave the area. Despite the sustainable development objective, the organizations have very few follow-up activities or plans after a program is terminated. This way, they have little control over whether or not the activities are maintained in the communities. This issue will be further discussed in chapter 7.3.4.

Sustainability requires commitment in providing long-term funding, human resources and follow-up procedures. Lack of sustainability could be a major barrier to disaster risk reduction. Many disaster reduction initiatives fail to reach their objectives and only marginally impact capacity building and vulnerability reduction because they are short-lived and are not followed-up.

7.1.3 Disaster Risk Reduction and Do No Harm

An unstable situation is increasing people's vulnerability and making the area more prone to disasters, and also conflicts. Environmental disasters have a direct effect on the people, but also an indirect effect on the stability situation in fragile countries as Liberia. In addition, the lack of sufficient and timely response can lead to mistrust and conflicts between the local authorities and the people. The long period of war in Liberia destroyed much of the infrastructure making the country more vulnerable.

This linkage between disasters and conflicts is recognized by very few of the informants. Conflicts in the aftermath of disasters can also have effect on emergency response and development programs that INGOs are working on, and therefore this understanding should be fundamental. If conflict arises, the focus of the program might have to be directed back to relief, and the developmental objectives of the programs could be difficult to obtain. Furthermore, yearly disasters with insufficient response can make it difficult for INGOs to replace emergency response with development. When long term sustainable development is hindered, the country lacks the strength to become more resilient, and stays vulnerable to the same disasters and conflicts. This keeps fragile countries fragile in the future as well.

This thesis suggest that DRR activities can be seen as connectors, or as Anderson (1999) calls it; local capacities for peace. DRR activities should be in everyone's interest, and can make people work together for a common goal. This possibility is not seen in a wide enough perspective. This might be caused by lack of contextual understanding and lack of understanding of the vital root causes of the vulnerability (Wisner et. al., 2004). According to Anderson, aid workers are often only aware of the factors that divide communities and do not recognize and relate to those that link them, their aid can reinforce the former and undermine the latter. In addition, the local communities prone to disasters are considered as victims, and not as the most important contributors for timely and effective response.

Vulnerability and resilience have mutually dependent effect on the communities coping with different situations. When one is increasing the other decreases, meaning that strengthening people's resilience leads to better coping mechanisms and the vulnerability is reduced. The best possible outcome of decreasing people's dependence on outside resources and assistance

is that it might lead to better stability in the country. As mentioned before, understanding vulnerability requires more than understanding societies past and present relations with regard to disasters. Therefore, this thesis argue that the organizations do not have a comprehensive understanding of the situations, people, their perceptions, capacities, and knowledge and how disaster risk interrelates with each of these.

INGOs are not fully aware of the situation, and how different actions do interrelate or affect each other. It is crucial to understand why disasters happen, and that it is not only natural events that cause them. As Anderson (1999) also indicates, "with enough information and understanding to predict negative patterns, it is also possible to find programming options". She also states that understanding of the interaction between aid and conflict becomes vital when considering programming options that is focusing on supporting the local capacities for peace. Basically, the organizations lack understanding of the root causes, as well as the factors that makes society more resilient to conflicts and disasters. The reason for this can be the lack of overall and successful vulnerability and capacity analyses conducted by the INGOs. They fail to take it far enough to find the programming possibilities and to use innovation and new methods to meet the challenges in the field.

7.2 Challenges with local involvement

"…programs should include training, local leadership and participant responsibility" (Maynard, 1999).

One of the cornerstones in DRR is community participation. Community involvement helps identifying vulnerability, but should also identify capacities and existing structures. Anderson and Woodrow (1998) describe a lesson learned as "the most important consideration is not so much whom is chosen as project participants, but how they participate". Despite that every organization said they focus on local participation in planning and implementation, they are less focused on how the local communities really participate. Terms like participants and beneficiaries are used interchangeably without a clear understanding and definition on what's what. The local community members are rarely involved in decision making, they are mainly

giving inputs and these are primarily about their needs. They then get the role of a vulnerable victim, not as a capacity or agents for change.

7.2.1 Community structures

"Though disasters typically require external aid in order to cope, external aid should support - not replace - local practices" (Fordham & Gupta, 2011).

When the organizations start to work in a community they establish and facilitate elections for new committees. This study shows that this is the most common way to work with the community. The community decides and elects the members, and this is perhaps why the informants call it local participation. The ideal way would be to identify and strengthen the existing structures rather than to establish parallel ones. There should be a determination to build capacity with, rather than forcing it upon, local actors (Cairns, 2012). Humanitarian organizations might think of this as a time consuming activity and fail to notice the long term benefits. The INGOs emphasize sustainability when they are describing their long term aim. Using local capacity improves the likelihood of sustainability through ownership of projects, according to Twigg (2004). To be successful, communities' participation should be interpreted as "being part of", not only "taking part in" a project activity, like workshops and assessments.

Various techniques have been used to engage communities. One of the reasons why INGOs fail to let local communities take part in decision making and let them "be part of" the project activities, is that they believe that what they are doing is good enough. This study indicates that the organizations are satisfied with the way they operate, but it is suggested in this research that there is room for improvement regarding local participation. The local communities should be involved in planning and implementation to a larger extent.

A reason why organizations are overlooking preexisting local structures might be that they are using top-down management. This often turns out to be unsuccessful in order to utilize the local capacities and knowledge. The top-down approach fails to involve people in development planning and disaster reduction. If the communities are given a stronger role in

disaster management, it is more likely that there will be a shift from top-down to a bottom-up approach. A bottom-up approach to program design will involve the communities themselves in planning and implementation of DRR activities and projects. This involvement goes further than when the local people "take part in the activities" or are beneficiaries only. This approach has received wide acceptance because communities are considered the best judges of their own vulnerability and can make the best decisions regarding their own well-being (Yodmani, 2001).

7.2.2 Assessments overlooking capacities

Consequences of disasters can be reduced if people are well informed and motivated towards a culture of disaster prevention and resilience (HFA, 2005). This requires the collection and dissemination of knowledge and information on the communities' hazards, vulnerabilities, and capacities. According to Anderson and Woodrow (1998), acknowledging local expertise, experiences, and knowledge should be a starting point when conducting assessments. However, this study shows that needs and vulnerabilities are the main focus in the INGOs' assessments.

The local people already know how the situation is when humanitarian organizations arrive, and involving the locals in the assessments will give the INGOs firsthand knowledge (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998). When focusing on the communities' needs and vulnerabilities the INGOs work "for them, and not with them". However, focusing on needs and vulnerabilities makes it easier for the organizations to implement their already designed projects. Then they don't have to take into consideration existing structures and coping mechanisms. Anderson and Woodrow (1998) argue that in order "to avoid increasing vulnerabilities, it is necessary to identify capacities in order to know what strengths exist in a society". To work developmentally with disaster affected people, the organizations must identify people's capacities and build on them (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998). Systematically identification and assessments of capacities and local knowledge are rarely conducted by the INGOs in Liberia.

The most mentioned assessment done by the organizations in this study is needs assessments. It is mentioned as a "pre-condition for intervention". Only a few acknowledge the need to collect information about which capacities and traditional coping mechanisms that exists. Communities might have perceptions that may or may not be based on reality, but nonetheless are important to consider in the development of risk reduction initiatives. "There is history of disasters in every community, and we work with the communities to understand the hazards by building their resilience", one of the informants expressed.

Scharffscher (2010) describes a gap between the resources that existed in the affected communities and what was acknowledged and utilized by international relief agencies. The same description can be applied to the situation in Liberia. An over-emphasis on the vulnerabilities decreases the possibility for recognizing the capacities which exist in the communities.

7.2.3 Virtual implementation

The country offices have an understanding that the way they involve the local communities are sufficient. However, this study showed that the local communities didn't have the same opinion. They didn't feel like their capacities and knowledge were neither utilized nor promoted. A possible reason for different understanding may be explained by what according to Scharffscher and Olsen (2010) is called "virtual implementation". Guiding documents and policies from head quarter level or country office level have a good intention, but they do not always have the intended effect or has a marginal effect on working practices at the field level (Scharffscher & Olsen, 2010). A virtual implementation happens when policy makers are paying less attention to actual effects on the field and focusing on disseminating the guiding document. This could also explain why the organizations, at country office level, are satisfied with the impact the projects have even if the beneficiaries disagree.

7.3 Challenges with Disaster Risk Reduction

The empirical data shows that there are many challenges considering DRR. These challenges are ranging from the understanding of the concept, to understanding of the context and how people living in disaster prone areas perceive the risk.

7.3.1 Conceptual challenges

The thesis has previously presented that the concept of DRR is "a relatively new one". It embraces earlier thinking and practice, meaning that the concept has incorporated the separate components of disaster management and the disaster cycle (preparedness, response, and recovery) into a more integrated disaster risk management approach. At the same time this seems to lead to confusion amongst people working with these issues. Combining several separate concepts under one umbrella leaves room for confusion. Even though it is good that the humanitarian world and organizations are changing in accordance with new requirements, these changes might take time. The same is probably happening with DRR as with terms as gender and climate change; it takes some time before people start to understand the ideas, and makes it a common practice. If there would not be room for this kind of changes we would still be seeing disasters purely as "acts of God". It is therefore vital to establish a common understanding of the basic tenets of Disaster Risk Reduction. "This understanding should be narrow enough to permit the systematic development of knowledge in the area, yet broad enough to impart a sense of familiarity of what it means amongst different stakeholder groups" (Olsen et al., 2007).

7.3.2 Invisible gains of prevention

Disasters can be reduced to a large extent if people are well motivated towards a culture of disaster prevention and resilience according to Priority Action 3 (HFA, 2005). There were many informants that understood the opportunities with awareness campaigns and that they might be used for changing mindset from response to prevention. This is important as the

consequences of potential disasters partly depend on the activities prior to the disaster (Twigg, 2004; Wisner et al., 2004). Several informants were concerned about the difficulty of getting people to work or to take ownership when the gain was not visible. Traditionally, more emphasis is placed on humanitarian response and relief activities, with little attention being paid to disaster reduction strategies that have the potential to save lives by (sometimes) simple measures and preparedness. A culture of relief has existed in Liberia for a long time. “For too long people have been used to get help”, according to an informant. It is challenging to change the way people think, especially when the benefits and gains connected to this change is not evident.

The preventive activities should be strengthened in humanitarian aid and development programs. According to the theory presented in this thesis, the focus should be on “building back better”. A large part of the emergency relief and development programs focuses on building the communities back to normalcy. At the governmental level the advocacy programs are aiming towards a change. At the community level more emphasis should be directed on the root causes that contributed to disasters (Wisner et al., 2004). The awareness campaigns should show that “normalcy” involved vulnerabilities that, if not changed, may lead to future disasters. And through these kinds of activities probably increase people’s ownership to get things better, “build back better”. Anderson and Woodrow (1998) indicate that a lack of understanding of “building back better” might influence field workers to unwittingly contribute to future vulnerabilities. Therefore, durable solutions are highly needed. More emphasis should be directed on building capacities and working with the communities and adding value to their work. It is also an important factor to learn from their experiences and help them to develop locally-led disaster response (Cairns, 2012). The process of capacity building should begin long before disaster strikes (ibid.).

7.3.3 Funding

Effective prevention strategies could save great values and livelihoods, and also many lives. The costs of prevention have to be paid in the present, but the benefits lie in the future. Hence, building a culture of prevention could be difficult. Moreover, the benefits are not concrete; they are the disasters that did not happen.

This study reveals that few of the INGOs have dedicated resources for disaster risk reduction or disaster management in general. This goes for both dedicated personnel and allocated financial resources. Some are indicating that it is difficult to get funding for prevention and contingency planning because the benefits are not tangible and visible. Development of a culture of prevention is one of the main challenges in DRR. As earlier described, this is a challenge considering the population in disaster prone areas, but it is also a challenge when it comes to donors. Only one percent of the 150 billion US dollar spent on the biggest humanitarian recipients over the past five years has been reported as DRR (GHA Report, 2011). It is easier to raise funds when the people who are suffering from the impact of a disaster are broadcasted, and the consequences are evident (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998). Additional funds and human resources need to be allocated at the national and international levels to address past deficiencies and build more resilient communities. With current funding levels, risk will continue to increase. The Capacity Needs Assessment in Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDP, NDMC & MIA, 2009) states that there are no designated funds and resources for DRR in the local government system.

7.3.4 Evaluation of impact

Several of the informants talked about how the impact is very difficult to measure and evaluate. It is easier to measure the output produced through the activities e.g. number of workshops held or number of books distributed. Outcome and impact is about the long term benefits that results from the program, like confidence, increased skills, new job etc. If the program is intended to last for a specific period of time, without adequate impact evaluation, the organizations cannot know if the objectives actually are reached.

Even if many of the organizations have long term aims and objectives like sustainable development and self-sufficient communities, none has the funding to follow up programs and projects after they are terminated. This is a disadvantage when it comes to strengthening the culture of prevention. “The challenging part is to measure outcomes a year or two after the project is finished, no donors will pay for that”, an informant expressed. The lack of monitoring and follow up activities means that they are not able to ensure that the development continues after the INGO leaves the area. To ensure continuation the INGOs are

dependent on that the communities and the government take ownership of the projects and continue the work. Therefore awareness and capacity building is of huge importance.

The lack of follow-up is recognized as a weakness by some of the INGOs. Some said that they do not "just want to leave an area and never come back, but we feel like we have no choice". The lack of follow up is also recognized by the people in the host communities. As an example, they received assistance from an INGO to build several water-pumps and they were also trained in how to repair them. But the communities have no tools or spare-parts, nor money to buy spare parts. Now, more than half of the water-pumps are broken and inoperative. The communities have tried to reach out to the INGO who built them, but they are no longer operating in the area. Follow-up procedures could have prevented this. This is an example of poor sustainability and long-term impact of programs, and this seems to be quite widespread.

7.3.5 Understanding risk perception

Before you can change the way people think about and perceive risk, you need to understand their perception. There were several explanations ranging from "people don't know they live with a risk", to "people know the risk but do not care", and "they know the risk but have no resources to address it". A key element in hazard and disaster management is awareness of how stakeholders perceive risk (Renn, 2008). It is highly important for the INGOs to know that people's behavior is preliminary driven by these perceptions and not by facts.

Levels of risk awareness depend largely on the quantity and quality of available information and on the difference in people's perceptions of risk. These can be influenced by the knowledge of hazards and vulnerabilities, as well as by the availability of accurate and timely information about them. Risk communication is closely linked with risk perception. It is important for the INGOs to remember that risk communication is also about what people want to know (Renn, 2008, p. 204), risk communication should be a mutual learning process and this could be a part of the assessments prior to the startup of a project. If the INGOs do not take into consideration what people want to know and need to know, "...it can be difficult to teach the communities the importance of washing their hands after toilet, when many of them

don’t have a toilet or a decent place to live, one need to have a good house, get basic things before focusing on hand hygiene”. Risk perception is as important in determining responses and coping strategies, as an objective “knowledge of risk”. Risk messages are constructed within, and as a result of social, economic and political contexts (Anderson & Woodrow, 1998).

7.4 Women’s involvement

Understanding gender roles is a part of understanding the context. Cultural patterns that structure the lives of men and women must be understood and taken into account, because gender relations are part of the social and cultural context that partly decides a community’s ability to prepare for disasters (Valdés, 2009). Acknowledging men and women’s different vulnerabilities is a starting point, but how to support and develop the different capacities is to take it further.

This study shows that, for most of the organizations, gender is mainly about women. Many authors and researches (e.g. Enarson, 2009; Twigg, 2004) agree that awareness of gender issues should be standard in development and relief programs. Each organization has a gender policy and uses the term “gender mainstreaming”. The informants express that they have gender on the agenda, and they consider gender to be an important issue. However, based on the findings in this study, the way theory and policies are translated into practice (implementation), is not always sufficient. This is supported by Twigg’s (2004) observation that most agencies have gender policies, even if it may be difficult to put the ideals into practice. Twigg (2004) also states that most organizations pay attention to gender, but often not in a systematic way. The organizations recognize men and women’s different vulnerabilities, but they have relatively little understanding of how to address this.

Women’s capacities are seldom recognized. For instance, many programs may seek to ensure that women take part in meetings, training, and community volunteering activities, but are less likely to look at ways to get women into leadership positions in those programs and in their communities. There should be more planning with the women, not simply for them. The

organizations measure women's involvement in their projects by how large shares of the beneficiaries are women.

Even if lack of time and funding are the most cited reasons for humanitarian agencies to not address the issue of gender, according to Byrne and Baden (1995), none of the organizations mentioned this as factors hampering their attempts of mainstreaming gender or involving women. The organizations are mostly satisfied with the way they involve women, but this study indicates that the involvement is mainly about women being beneficiaries.

7.4.1 Women as key resources

Researchers highlight that women in disaster communities are key resources (e.g. Fordham & Gupta, 2011; Enarson, 2009; Scharffscher, 2010), and disaster risk reduction projects, policies and programs will be meaningful and successful only if the interests of the whole community are taken into consideration (UNISDR, 2008). As mentioned, most informants gave their answer in how many (percent) of the beneficiaries were women, when asked about women's involvement. When considering women as beneficiaries, women's involvement is limited to receiving assistance. Their potential positive contribution in the decision making is rarely mentioned.

Without the input of both men and women, risk reduction strategies will not be designed for the entire community. One of the most immediate practical challenges is to make sure that risk reduction measures are convenient regarding women's busy working day. Community meetings and training sessions should be held at times of the day when women are most likely to be free from domestic tasks and other tasks. Twigg (2004) states that women's resilience and skills in coping with crisis make up a valuable resource that is under-utilized by field agencies. This study shows that this is often the case in Liberia as well. An over-emphasis on the vulnerabilities increase the possibility that their capacities will be overlooked (Enarson, 2009).

Women often organize themselves in networks or organizations (Scharffscher, 2010; Fordham & Gupta, 2011). In the host communities women organized in a group called "Concerned

Women". However, there had not been any contact between this group and INGOs. To map these organizations and networks, and seek out credible women leaders in communities is a way to include women and promote their capacities in disaster risk reduction. Even if the informants gave many examples of women's community involvement, women are still largely excluded from formal planning and decision-making. Women need to be empowered to do so effectively. To ensure that women's views are properly represented in project planning and implementation – before, during and after a disaster – is a main challenge. By doing so, it can be easier to tackle the root causes of their vulnerabilities and not only focus on the apparent vulnerabilities.

7.4.2 Cultural norms constrain women's participation

Root causes of female vulnerability are often to be found in the social structures or customs that create gender inequality (Twigg, 2004). Gender inequality is prevalent in society in daily life at the level of the family, community, and society and reflected in institutionally, social and cultural norms (Ariyabandu, 2009). The main challenge for female participation in decision making and impact in programs in Liberia lies in the culture and traditions. Several informants mentioned this as a challenge for women's involvement. The Liberian society have traditionally been ruled by men, and women have had limited participation in decision making. To change this, the organizations must target both women and men in order to try to change the way they think and behave. Much process has been made, but it is still a long way to go. To increase women's involvement in the programs beyond their role as beneficiaries, the organizations need to have women working for them in the field. They recognize this need, but they do not have specific plans about how to do it.

Demands on women could reduce their resilience. Men are often out in the field, or working away from home. Women usually stay home, taking care of children and other relatives. They are responsible for farming, getting water, prepare food etc. If women are primarily responsible for water collection and maintaining the farm, a flood or drought will increase their work load immensely. They might have to walk longer distances to find water or firewood and therefore spend longer time away from home. Some of the informants said that

women were more interested in taking part in DRR activities because it benefits them directly, because of their role concerning children and homes.

8. Conclusion

The concept of Disaster Risk Reduction and how the humanitarian organizations are involving and promoting the local women's capacities have been the focus of this research. The findings outline the challenges that are embedded in Disaster Risk Reduction and the factors hampering involvement of local capacities, especially women. The thesis has been organized in accordance with four research questions that have guided the process in order to answer the main research problem.

The first research question focused on defining the DRR activities in Liberia. This study demonstrates that the concept is understood differently. The humanitarian organizations have little knowledge of the concept, and how to implement the concept objectives (e.g. HFA) in their activities in an effective and adequate way. It is difficult in the humanitarian world to make blueprints that works in changing, unsecure and dynamic situations. Sustainability should be the goal in order to gain long term impact in development. If the fragile states are not built back better, they are kept in the same cycle of vulnerability and are prone to the same disasters year after year. Changing from response to a culture of prevention could be a reasonable beginning to build resilient societies.

Capacity building is an important program objective in order to achieve results that are sustainable. A project without adequate evaluation and follow-up may not reach the desirable results. These issues have been addressed in the next research questions. One asking for the ways local capacities are identified and involved; the other discussing challenges in DRR activities. There is a vital capacity existing in disaster prone communities, even though they are often relying on the outside assistance from the INGOs. It is their responsibility to make sure of that the local capacities and existing structures are strengthened instead of overlooked. This research acknowledges that the latter is often the case. Another finding is that the organizations imagine they do more capacity building than what seems to be the reality. This study suggests that there is a gap between the objectives and aims in disaster risk reducing projects and the impact these have on the local communities. With more effective coordination, knowledge, and awareness, the humanitarian organizations could reach better results and get more value for the funding.

The last research question asked about women's role in disaster risk reduction activities. This research shows that each organization calls for gender equality, and that women's special needs and vulnerabilities are acknowledged. There is need for these organizations to realize that the work should be done at field level with the beneficiaries, and not for them. The local women are amongst those who can contribute to the transformation to more resilient communities, but little is done to actually strengthen or promoting their capacities. The research indicates that the focus is directed to their vulnerabilities.

One of the conclusions in this study is that the INGOs have an impression that sufficient work is done in order to involve the local communities and women in their disaster risk reducing activities. However, they should put more emphasize on trying to identify and strengthen the capacities and the existing structures. Women's involvement is limited to receive assistance, but involvement should be about people being a part of the projects. Their capacities and knowledge should be taken into account and further promoted. There are several frameworks for program design and project planning for humanitarian organizations that acknowledges the capacities of the vulnerable. Hyogo Framework for Action (2005) calls for use of knowledge and innovation in order to build the culture of safety and resilience at all levels. This would be a good starting point for improving risk reduction and enhance humanitarian organizations' accountability to local communities.

8.1 Further Research

This research is describes the concept of Disaster Risk Reduction and in which way the humanitarian organizations are involving and promoting local women and their capacities. This research found a gap in people's knowledge and understanding about the concept. An interesting in depth research could be conducted on the knowledge of the concept and how it contributes or hampers the programs' final long term on the local communities.

Another possible direction for further research would be to take one sector (e.g. WASH or agriculture), and conduct a similar study in a narrower context. This way the researcher may

go deeper into the data about which elements in the projects that reduce risks. This way one could get valuable findings about the implementation in different sectors.

There has been a particular focus on women in this study. The study shows that their capacities are rarely given an adequate attention. There is need for further research about how women can identify and express their capacities, not only their vulnerabilities.

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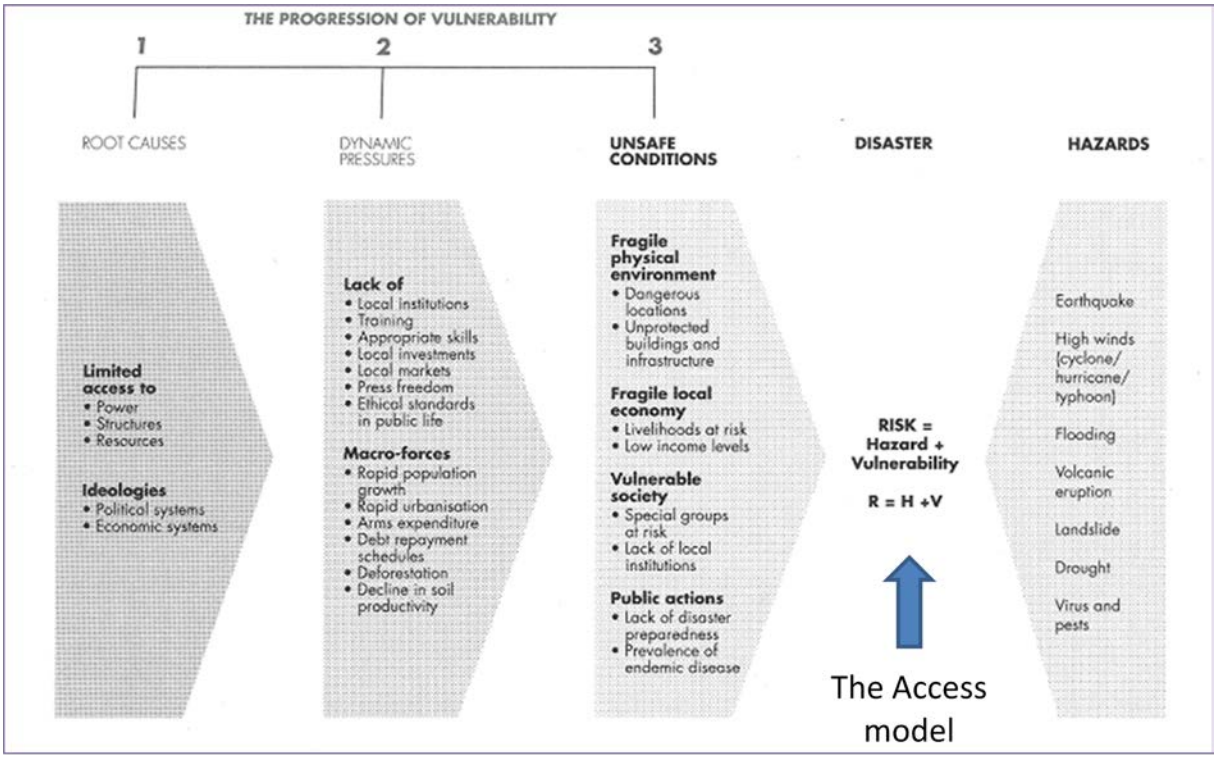
Appendix 1


Guinea
Côte d'Ivoire
Liberia
NIMBA COUNTY ZOOM
Loguatuo
Toe Town
PTP Refugee Camp
Bong
Nimba
Grand Bassa
Rivercess
GrandGedeh
River Ghee
Sinoe
Grand Kru
Maryland
GREENVILLE
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Sierra Leone
Guinea
Cote d'Ivoire
Liberia
ATLANTIC OCEAN
World Food Programme
EASTERN LIBERIA
Crossing Points, Transit Sites and Relocation Villages as of 9th June
Kilometers
0 20 40 60
National Capital
Intermediate Town
Small Town
Village
Airfield
Airstrip
Port
Logistics Sector Hub
Crossing Point
UNHCR Camp
UNHCR Planned Camp
Transit Site
Relocation Village
Registered border village
Primary road
Secondary road
Tertiary road
Trail
Railway
National boundary
First level admin boundary
Surface Waterbody
River

Appendix 2



The PAR and Access Model.
Source: Wisner et al. (2004).

Appendix 3

INGO (Country office)

BACKGROUND INFORMATON:

1. Organization and position?

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION:

2. Which elements in your projects are aiming to prevent and reduce risk for future disasters and other undesirable events?
    - What do you do if these disasters happen?

3. Does your organization have specific and allocated resources for risk management?

GENDER:

4. Does your organization have a gender policy?

    - How is it implemented in daily routines in your projects? Examples?
    - What kind follow up actions have there been after implementation?
    - How is the projects' impact on gender equality evaluated?
    - In what way could gender aspects be improved?

PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION:

5. What kind of preliminary work is done when designing a new project? Examples?
    - How do you consider how the project might effect or reduce risk?
    - Who are included in this process? Who gives inputs about deciding which project to be implemented?

6. How is your projects organized?
    - Who has the authority to make decisions?
    - What kind of routines do you have to evaluate the risks in your projects and/or the following outcome (during the project)?
    - How does your organization evaluate the impact of your interventions?
    - How are local women being included?

7. How many of your projects have female managers? (out of total)
    - What are the advantages and disadvantages with female managed projects?

LOCAL CAPACITIES:

8. What have you learned from local experiences in order to prevent and reduce risk?
    - And what do you think they have learned from your organization?

9. What are the biggest threats to women's welfare in Liberia?
    - Are you mapping these issues before putting your projects into action?

- What kind of traditions and resources exists in local communities to resist/reduce these threats?

10. Can you describe the local women's role in your projects?
    - What kind of role do they play in the risk reducing projects and/or activities?
    - What kind of communication do you have with the local women?
    - What measures should be taken in order to improve the participation of local women in your projects?

CLOSURE:

11. What is your organization's long term aim for the communities?
    - What are the most important improvements the INGOs should do in order to reach better results in humanitarian context?

12. What do you think about the states capacity to respond to potential disasters?

13. Anyone else you think we should talk to regarding these subjects?

14. Anything else you would like to add?

INGO – Field Workers

BACKGROUND INFORMATON

1. Organization and position?

2. Can you tell me a little bit about your projects here in _____?

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION:

3. What kinds of disasters are likely to happen in this area?

4. Which elements and/or activities in your projects are preventing and reducing risk for future disasters and other undesirable events?
    - What do you do if these disasters happen?

GENDER:

5. How is the organization's gender policy implemented in daily routines in your projects?
    - What kind follow up actions is there regarding gender?
    - In what way could gender aspects be improved?

PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION:

6. How is your projects organized?
    - Who has the authority to make decisions?
    - What does a project manager do? What kind of responsibility do they have? Who do they report to? How is the communication between different levels?
    - What kind of routines do you have to evaluate the risks in your projects and/or the following outcome (during the project)?

- How does your organization evaluate the impact of your interventions?
- How are local women being included?

7. How many of your projects here have female managers?
    - What are the advantages and disadvantages with female managed projects?

LOCAL CAPACITIES:

8. Can you describe the local women's role is in your projects?
    - What kind of role do they play in the (risk reducing) projects and/or activities?
    - What kind of communication do you have with the local women?
    - What measures could be taken in order to improve the participation of local women in your projects?

9. What are the biggest threats to women's welfare in Liberia?
    - What kind of traditions and resources exists in local communities to resist/reduce these threats?

10. What is your project's long term aim for the communities?

11. Anyone else you think we should talk to regarding these subjects?

12. Anything else you would like to add

Local NGOs

BACKGROUND INFORMATON:

1. Organization and position, background and experience?

2. What kind of cooperation do you have with INGOs regarding activities that aim to reduce risk?
    - What have you learned from INGOs regarding reducing risks, and what do you think they could learn from you?
    - How is your ideas and knowledge being respected?
    - What would you change or what could be improved regarding the cooperation?

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION:

3. Which elements and/or activities in your projects are preventing and reducing risk for future disasters and other undesirable events?
    - What do you do if these disasters happen?

4. What do you think about the states capacity to respond to potential disasters?

GENDER:

5. Does your organization have a gender policy?
    - How is it implemented in daily routines in your organization?
    - What kind follow up actions have there been after implementation?
    - In what way could gender aspects be improved?

PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION:

6. What kind of preliminary work is done when designing a new project?
    - How do you consider how the project might effect or reduce risk?
    - Who are included in the assessment?

7. How is your projects organized?
    - Who has the authority to make decisions?
    - Who do they report to? How is the communication between different levels?
    - What kind of routines do you have to evaluate the risks in your projects and/or the following outcome (during the project)?
    - How does your organization evaluate the impact of your interventions?
    - How are local women being included?

8. How many of your projects have female managers? (out of total)
    - What are the advantages and disadvantages with female managed projects?

LOCAL CAPACITIES:

9. What are the biggest threats to women's welfare in Liberia?
    - What kind of traditions and resources exists in local communities to resist/reduce these threats?

10. Can you describe the local women's role is in your projects?
    - What kind of role they do play in the (risk reducing) projects and/or activities?
    - What kind of communication do you have with the local (women) organizations?
    - What measures should be taken in order to improve the participation of local women in your projects?

11. What could be done to improve the participation of local women in INGO projects?

CLOSURE:

12. Do you have any thoughts about your organization's future in Liberia?
    - What is your organization's long term aim for the communities?
    - Do you have any thoughts about Liberia's future?
    - What are the most important improvements the INGOs should do in order to reach better results in humanitarian context?

13. Anyone else you think we should talk to regarding these subjects?

14. Anything else you would like to add?

Interest groups (i.e. Disaster Relief Commission; Ministry of internal affairs)

1. Can you tell us about the commission/department and what you do?
    - What is your position? How long have you worked here? What kind of experience do you have?

2. Can you tell about the situation in Liberia regarding hazards that could cause disasters?
    - What are the most common hazards?

- What kind of disasters can be caused?

3. What does the commission do to reduce risk for future disasters?

Contingency planning	
Risk assessments	
Vulnerability and/or capacity assessments	
Training	
Coordination	
Workshops	

- Can you give examples of what the commission does if a disaster occurs?

4. What are the main challenges that might hamper efforts to reduce risk?

Material resources	Funding
Personnel/human resources	Communication
Financial Resources	Time pressure
Knowledge/expertise	Coordination
Other?	

5. Is it required that local communities participate in activities that aim to reduce risk?
   - How can they contribute? Do they have any kind of responsibility? What kind of inputs do they have? Can you give us examples on how the local communities have been a part in risk reducing activities?

6. Which organizations do you cooperate with? (Name the three most important.)
   - Why do you cooperate with these? What are you working together on? What do they contribute with? What do you contribute with?
   - Can you give examples on how INGOs have reduced risks?

7. How do you think INGOs utilize and/or strengthen local capacities?
   - Is their activities designed to avoid dependencies in the future?
   - Do you think they are doing sufficient assessments/analyzes prior to interventions? Can you give examples?

8. Anything else you would like to add?

9. Anyone else you think we should talk to regarding these subjects?

Appendix 4

Organization	Position	Location	Type of organization
Disaster Relief Commission	Manager-in-Training and Acting Director for Disaster Unit	Monrovia	Governmental
Adventist Development & Relief Agency (ADRA)	Country Director, Relief Program manager and Development Program Manager	Monrovia	INGO
Africare	Country Director	Monrovia	INGO
Caritas Monrovia	Administrative Assistant	Monrovia	INGO
Finn Church Aid (KUA)	Country Director and Program Manager	Monrovia	INGO
Finnish Refugee Council (FRC)	Country Representative	Monrovia	INGO
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	Head of Delegation	Monrovia	INGO
Mercy Corps	Country Director	Monrovia	INGO
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	Country Director	Monrovia	INGO
Oxfam GB	The Program and Quality Manager	Monrovia	INGO
Plan International	Disaster Risk Reduction Manager	Monrovia	INGO
Save the Children UK	Country Director	Monrovia	INGO
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Program Manager for Environment Unit	Monrovia	UN
United Nations Children`s Fund (UNICEF)	Country Representative and Emergency Coordinator	Monrovia	UN
Liberian National Red Cross Society (LNRCS)	Secretary General	Monrovia	NGO
Liberian National Red Cross Society (LNRCS)	Director for Disaster Management	Monrovia	NGO
Ministry of Internal Affairs	County Inspector	Sanniqullie	Governmental
Norwegian Refugee Council	Camp Management Coordinator	Saclepea	INGO
Save the Children	Child Protection Manager	Saclepea	INGO
International Rescue Committee (IRC)	2 representatives from the Livelihood program, 2 representatives from the Community Services program and 2 representatives from the Gender Based Violence program	Bahn Refugee Camp	INGO
Environmental Foundation of Africa (EFA)	Project Coordinator	Bahn Refugee Camp	INGO
Norwegian Church Aid	Team Leader and Project Manager for Hygiene	Saclepea	INGO
Danish Refugee Council (DRC)	Head of Office and Program Manager	Sanniqullie	INGO

Beneficiaries	Main Informants	Location	Number of participants
Bahn Refugee Camp	Chairman, Co-chairman and block leaders	Bahn Refugee Camp	4 Females 3 Males (+audience)
Host Community	Host Community Representative	Beadatuo	2 Females 2 Males (+ audience)
Host Community	Host Community Representative and Town Chief	Beeplay	2 Females 2 Male (+audience)

Appendix 5

Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015

Priority Action 1: Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.

Countries that develop policy, legislative and institutional frameworks for disaster risk reduction and that are able to develop and track progress through specific and measurable indicators have greater capacity to manage risks and to achieve widespread consensus for, engagement in and compliance with disaster risk reduction measures across all sectors of society

Priority Action 2: Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.

The starting point for reducing disaster risk and for promoting a culture of disaster resilience lies in the knowledge of the hazards and the physical, social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities to disasters that most societies face, and of the ways in which hazards and vulnerabilities are changing in the short and long term, followed by action taken on the basis of that knowledge.

Priority Action 3: Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.

Disasters can be substantially reduced if people are well informed and motivated towards a culture of disaster prevention and resilience, which in turn requires the collection, compilation and dissemination of relevant knowledge and information on hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities.

Priority Action 4: Reduce the underlying risk factors.

Disaster risks related to changing social, economic, environmental conditions and land use, and the impact of hazards associated with geological events, weather, water, climate variability and climate change are addressed in sector development planning and programmes as well as in post-disaster situations.

Priority Action 5: Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

At times of disaster, impacts and losses can be substantially reduced if authorities, individuals and communities in hazard-prone areas are well prepared and ready to act and are equipped with the knowledge and capacities for effective disaster management.